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REALMS OF FANTASY

COVER: A mage holds a dragon's life within his glowing hands in "Dragonfire" by Michael Whelan. ABOVE: Within the wizard's tome are many amazing things, but none as magical as the art of Dean Morrissey, featured in the Gallery beginning on page 72.

Departments

6 EDITORIAL
Don't sit so close to that TV!

8 LETTERS

12 BOOKS *BY GAHAN WILSON*
Tales of hope and absolute despair, sheep, magic lands, and a bird.

20 FOLKROOTS *BY TERRI WINDLING*
Deer Maiden and Selkie Skins: Tales of shamans, shape-shifters, and the animal people.

28 MOVIES *BY DAN PEREZ*
Dark fantasy comes to life in 13 creepy films you never saw.

72 GALLERY *BY LINDA D'AGOSTINO CLINGER*
Artist Dean Morrissey takes us on a voyage to his universe of imagination and wonder.

78 GAMES *BY MARK SUMNER*
Daggerfall offers role players a continent worth of adventure.

90 CONTRIBUTORS

Fiction

36 WHERE'S THE LUCK?
By William Nabors
Some people have it, some people don't.

40 THE SECRET OF THE MUMMY'S BRAIN
By William R. Eakin
Look out — what's that behind you?! Eek, it's ALIVE!! It's alive!

46 LOVE EQUALS FOUR, PLUS SIX
By A. M. Dellamonica
We are more than the sum of all our parts — when cells divide, the opportunities for love multiply.

52 THE STOVER CUT
By Calvin Horne
It's a strange old world out there, and you never know who — or what — you'll run into. Best keep an eye out ...

58 HOLDING PATTERN
By Jack McDevitt
Sometimes you just need a second chance — to get it right this time.

66 COYOTE WOMAN
By Margaret Ball
The desert sands told ancient secrets—but give Coyote a chance to speak and you'll soon learn all.

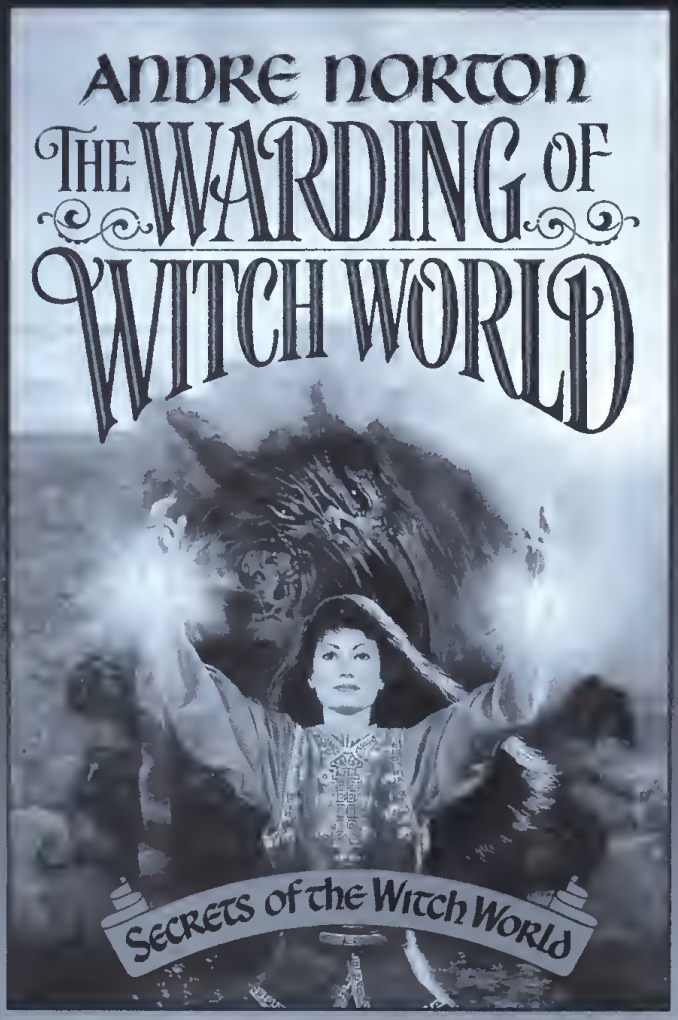
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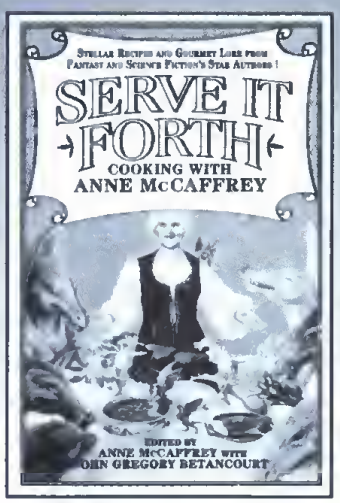
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Don't Sit So Close to That TV!

AS THOSE OF YOU WHO carefully read the masthead each issue know, I have a terrific assistant named Becky McCabe. One of Becky's main jobs is screening the thousands of submissions we get each month, and the other day she mentioned to me that she's seeing a disturbing trend in incoming mail. Not only have the submissions tripled (disturbing enough in and of itself), but she says that the vast majority of them now are thinly veiled (if veiled at all) episodes of *Xena, Warrior Princess, Hercules,* and *Highlander.*

Now these shows are all good fun — I watch them myself, occasionally, and often enjoy them. But they are not short stories in any way, shape, or form. First of all, and this is VERY IMPORTANT, SO LISTEN UP. They are other people's property. They are copyrighted. They do not belong to you. You cannot use them or their characters in your stories. You will be sued if you do it. Got that? Go back and read it again just to be sure. Yes, this means even in little stories for yourselves and your friends. Yes, this means even in fanzines. Yes, this means even on-line. I know, I know, many of you have friends who write fanzine stories using these and other characters from movies and TV. Perhaps you've done it yourself. And look, you haven't been sued, you're not in jail, and you haven't received a single threatening letter from a lawyer. I have only one reply to that: not *yet.* Keep it up and all these things will happen, though not in the order in which I've listed them. Let's not forget who you're dealing with here — these people are from Hollywood and they mean business. They won't think it's cute that you're so devoted and they won't give you a break because you're only 16. They will sue your butts off if they catch you. So don't try it. (The tie-in books that you buy by the dozens at the bookstore — they're licensed by the copyright holder and thus legal.)

Another good reason (as if you needed one) not to try it is because no one outside of those illegal fanzines will ever publish them. They're not real stories. Even if you change the characters' names and move them from Greece to Anatolia, you haven't done anything creative when you rewrite a *Xena* episode — you've only taken someone else's characters and universe and trotted them around to suit your fancy. A real story comes from your very own heart and soul, not the hearts and souls (if such exist) of Hollywood television writers.

Interestingly enough, I've had to argue this point with would-be writers for years. However, 20 years ago, I was making the point that one cannot create a fantasy story by renaming Bilbo Baggins and Frodo and that someone else had already written *The Hobbit.* I'm guessing (and it actually isn't much of a guess, more of a certainty) that this is because fewer of you are reading these days — it's possible that some of you don't even know who Frodo is. If you fall into this category, I have a homework assignment for you — go find out. Frankly, I got a much higher grade of plagiarism in the old days, and at least those of you who were plagiarizing Tolkien were working from a format meant to accommodate the written word. Television screenplays follow a far different format than short stories, and if you adopt their pacing you'll never be able to find the voice and the rhythm that real short fiction requires.

These are topics far more suited to writing workshop than an editorial, however, so I'll leave you with one more word of advice — find your own voice and your stories will find you. ❧

Shawna McCarthy

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VOLUME 3 NUMBER 2

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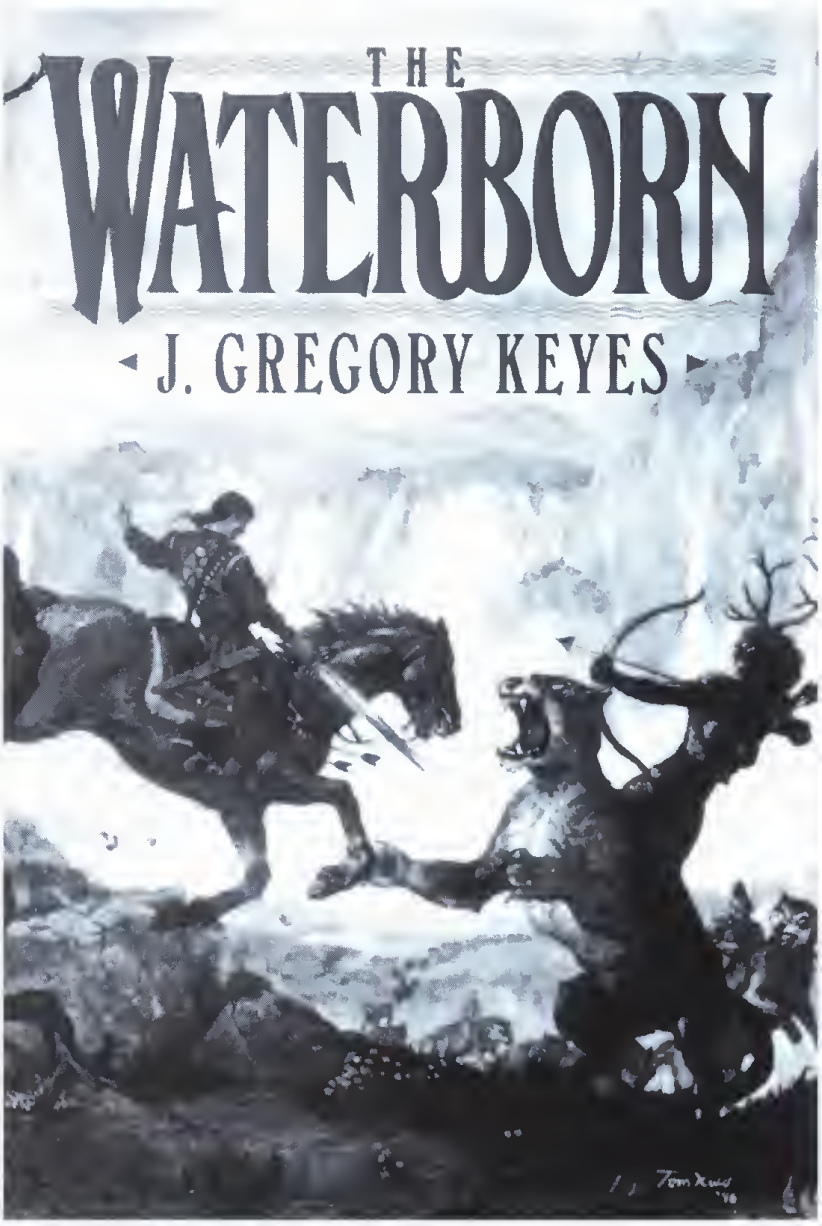
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Dear Shawna,

First let me say that when it comes to nonfiction articles within RoF, especially "Folkroots" and "Gallery," no other fantasy publication contains such excellent pieces or even comes close. In this regard, RoF is beyond reproach.

However, I do have a bone to pick with you. It concerns David Flanagin's letter to the editor and your reply to it. While it is extremely rare for me to write a confrontational letter to an editor for any reason, I, too, have done so when I feel the editor in question has been particularly dense. This is especially the case if I submit a piece to a magazine and it is turned down, and upon reading the next issue of that magazine, I see works that are unquestionably inferior to mine.

I also possess the "maturity" that comes with having written professionally for many years, and from having worked as a staff writer, editorial assistant, and reader for several small press publications. I pride myself on being absolutely objective in my views. With this being so, I am confident of the validity of my viewpoint when I choose to speak out.

Your response to Mr. Flanagin's letter was quite unprofessional, and that bothered me. Holding up a contributor's letter for the sole purpose of ridiculing the writer is not very mature. Just because someone throws a fit and calls you names doesn't mean you should sink to their level. However, even that could be overlooked had Mr. Flanagin been completely incorrect in his views. He was not entirely wrong in what he said.

While you have published some breathtaking works within the pages of RoF (Lisa Cohen's "Leuka and Phlego," Neil Gaiman's marvelous tale "Troll Bridge," and the sublime "Diana of the Hundred Breasts" from Mr. Silverberg are a few examples of what you are doing right, — you have also given space to works that do indeed fit Mr. Flanagin's description of "... average and clumsily written, cliché-filled fantasy stories..." In particular I am referring to pieces like "Snow" by Al Sarrantonio, Jo Clayton's "Pavanne for a Dead Pross," Tanith Lee's "Doll Skulls," and Mr. Watt-Evans' "Beth's Unicorn." Surely these cannot be the best of the many hundreds of submissions you receive every reading period. I say this despite being a longtime fan of Ms. Clayton and Mr. Watt-Evans. Just because the writer has made a name in the past does not mean that everything they write now is etched in gold.

No editor is perfect. Because of that, he or she will, on occasion, fail to see what is in front of them. This is true in instances where the editor overlooks works of subtlety and quiet merit from a relatively unknown writer, and in instances where he or she looks only as far as the big name on the title page of a manuscript.

Currently, I have two more issues on my subscription. When they run out, I am not sure I will renew with RoF. I can always page through future issues on my local bookseller's racks to read the parts that interest me, can't I? Sadly, this might be the case if the deficiencies that I perceive are not soon resolved. What's one less subscriber? I'm not just one subscriber, I assure you, nor am I just one potential contributor. Readers like me, and my acquaintances (of which there are quite a few), are the reason for magazines such as RoF. As for the "form" rejection slips that Mr. Flanagin complained about, well, he's right. Any editor who cannot take the time to jot down a few sentences of comments is just a touch too self-important. Keep up the good work that you are doing and try to get the rest of RoF up to that level.

Bryan A. Bushemi
Orland Park, IL.

Let me introduce myself Bryan. I am the "self-important" assistant editor, Rebecca McCabe, who sends out the majority of those form rejections, as well as the one who rejected Mr. Flanagin's story.

I am glad to hear you find our nonfiction excellent and some of the fiction breathtaking. As for the subject of form rejections and personal replies, this is the real world where you are competing with thousands of other writers, many of whom are better than you are. Unfortunately , it is just not feasible for this staff to critique every story that graces our desks. Rejection (in any form) comes with the territory of being a professional writer.

It is wonderful to get a handwritten comment from the editor — but it is not to be expected. Nor is a rejection a personal attack on you or your writing. I know Shawna has pointed out on numerous occasions that the sheer volume of manuscripts we receive prohibits personal reply.

Bryan, I would like to clear up a huge misconception you seem to have about our magazine. I am often the first set of eyes on our contributor's manuscripts. You suggest that there is no one looking out for the interests of the quieter, subtle, lesser known writers. You could not be more wrong. I would love nothing better than to present my bosses with a wonderful new work by an unknown writer and be able to say, "See what I have discovered, see what I have rescued from obscurity for all the world to read!" In other words, I'm always on the lookout for new writers with amazing stories.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

If I may say so, it's even luckier than you realize that you chose not to accept David Flanagin's story. This was to have been my last issue. No reflection on the magazine, it's just that the reading material in this house is piling up faster than I can read it.

Then I read that letter and got an amusing reminder of why I subscribed in the first place — the love of a great story. Genre fiction, whether fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, romance, or western is often treated with derision and contempt by many literary and academic circles.

Personally, I suspect an enlarged and painfully swollen hubris prevents the enjoyment of a good tale.

Thanks for printing Mr. Flanagin's letter, Ms. McCarthy. I am proud to be a "slow" reader of "the quite average" stories in your wonderful magazine. Put me down for two more years and best of luck to you!

Elaine Weaver
Dahlonega, GA.

To Shawna McCarthy and Robert Silverberg,

I just finished reading Silverberg's "Diana of the Hundred Breasts" from your February 1996 issue and was so impressed I had to stop right there and pound out a letter.

Having been an avid fantasy and science fiction fan most of my life, I have always been upset that a large number of writers of this genre portray religion — specifically Christianity — as being backward, destructive, or just plain bad. Too many stories are populated with cardboard, dumb, ignorant religious characters who fear everything.

Silverberg's Mr. Gladstone was a great kick in the pants! Neither a fascist nor a fanatic, Gladstone is what many religiously active people are: happy with their beliefs, yet still aware of the beliefs other people have. Yes, we may all know the narrow-minded fanatic who throws a scripture at us every chance he/she gets, but for every fanatic there are usually 10 other people we know, who are just as devout, but who realize the world's broad-ranging religious and scientific tapestry is of great value in their lives.

Thank you, Mr. Silverberg, for shining a spotlight of reality into the world we call fantasy and science fiction. As a person who believes in the equal value of theology and technology, I appreciated your Mr. Gladstone very much.

And thank you, Ms. McCarthy, for having the wisdom to publish "Diana of the Hundred Breasts." February 1996 was the first issue of my subscription, and if the rest of the year is this good, I won't ever drop RoF.

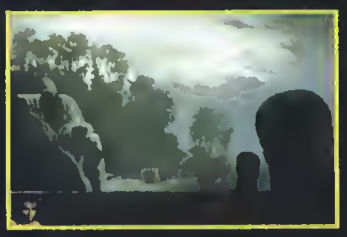
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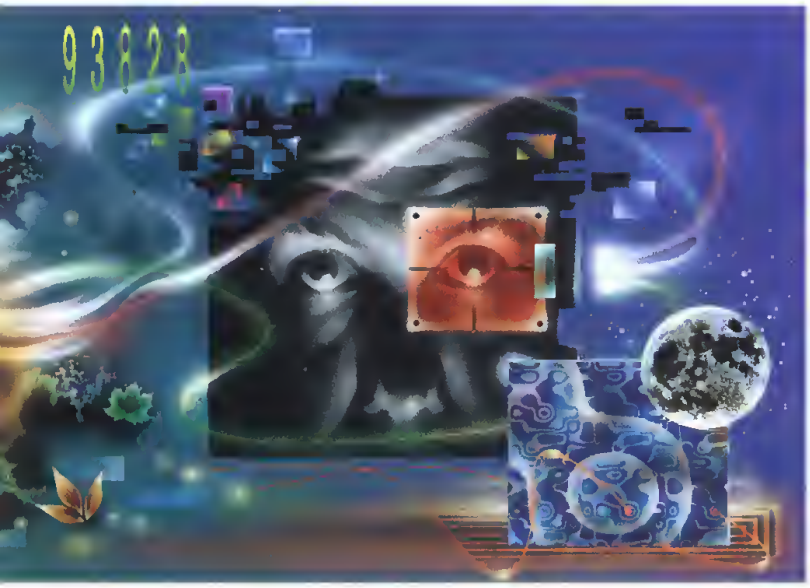
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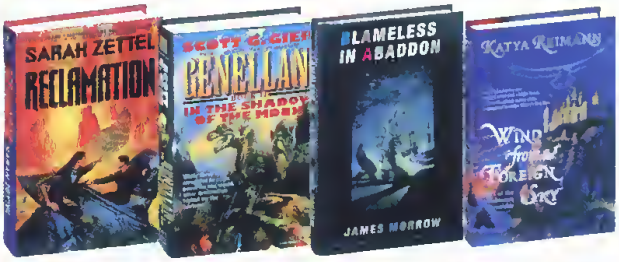


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BY GAHAN WILSON

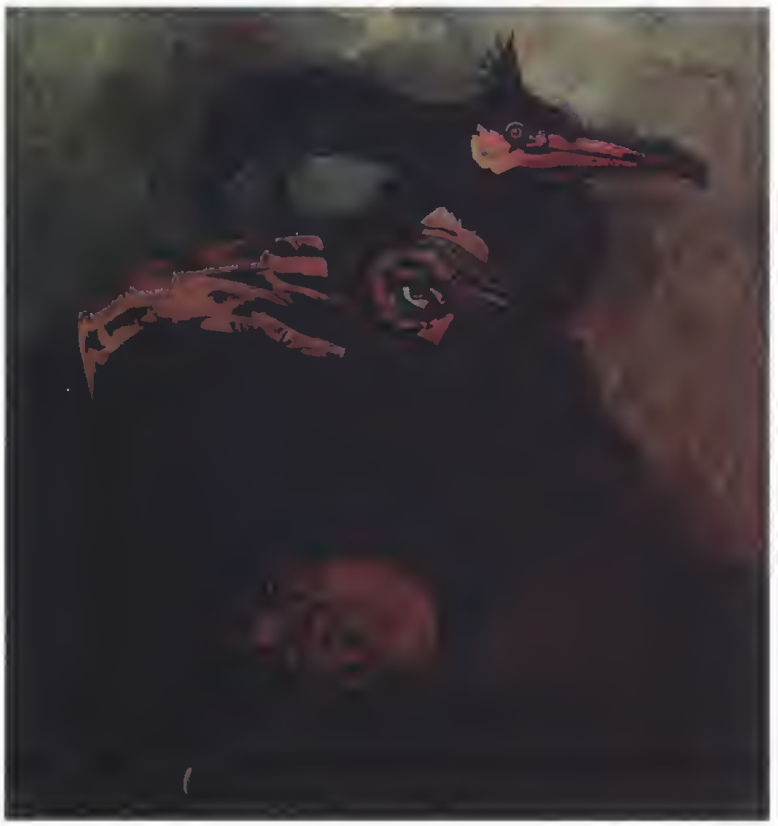
Tales of hope and absolute despair, sheep, magic lands and a bird.

THE OUTSTANDING THING I'VE NOTICED ABOUT PEOPLE WHO REALLY DON'T LIKE fantasy is that they *really* don't like it. They stiffen in their chairs at the mention of it, their eyes glare, their nostrils widen, and their hands may even form into fists. They *hate* the stuff.

I remember being startled and surprised the first time I saw this happening; it was so totally unexpected since it seemed to come from nowhere and contradict all that had come before. I was a child and had been regularly and routinely absorbed in fantasy with no complaints from any quarter for my whole life up to then. No one had minded my loving stuffed animals as much as any living creature; there had been no objections to my fighting elaborate wars in the back seat of the family car so long as I soft-pedaled the saliva-laden sound effects of explosions and crashings; and nary a negative word had been uttered about the enthusiastic games of Cowboys and Indians and interstel lar explorations which I and my small friends shouted our way through one autumn afternoon after another. Now, from nowhere at all, came the news that make-believe had suddenly become bad. I hadn't a clue as to why.

What had happened, of course, was that I had reached the age my society had decided was the time for turning away from teddy bears and rocket ships and thrilling things lurking in the darkness. Now it was the stern duty of my parents and the elders of my tribe to teach me how to put childish fantasy aside, *forever*. Now and henceforth it was absolutely and positively essential that I completely accept the real world, get it in tight, exclusive focus, and firmly take up its challenges. Period. End of command.

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I fought this edict with every fiber of my being. I fought it tooth and claw. I furtively read and collected all the comic books I could get my hands on, snuck into disreputable theaters in order to view forbidden movies, devoured every word of lurid magazines catering to my disreputable tastes — I am sure *Realms of Fantasy* would have been among them had it existed at that time — and otherwise did what I could to keep dwelling among wonders.

Needless to say, I overshot the mark, got into a wide variety of trouble, and, though I have attained some small degree of practicality, my attitude gives me problems to this day.

The truth is that the realists, those who have such a problem giving fantasy any space at all in their world view, do have a point. This is a tough world and it is absolutely suicidal not to learn at least the basics of how to deal with its ordinary dangers.

Where they go wrong is in assuming their real world includes *everything*. Of course it does not. Newton is great on planetary motion, but not much on black holes. The pragmatic tribal leaders have explanations for very, very little of what our lives are all about deep down inside (and way out) and if we ignore or suppress the "fantastic" in order to control the "realistic" we will (and commonly do) rapidly find ourselves in dangerous places. The teddy bears will have their picnic with a vengeance.

One writer who understands all of the above (and much, much more) far better than almost all others exploring such themes today is Jonathan Carroll. I hope you have already exposed yourself to *The Land of Laughs* or *Outside the Dog Museum* or *From the Teeth of Angels*. If you haven't read them or any of his other novels, please allow me to suggest you go out right now and grab one at random. Don't worry, with Carroll you don't have to fret about the best book to begin with. They're *all* good.

The Panic Hand (St. Martin's Press, New York, NY; 304 pp;

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hardcover; $22.95) is something different since it is his very first collection of short stories. I have previously read some of them (mostly in *Omni* and *Weird Tales*) but many were brand new to me, including "Black Cocktail," a marvelous short novel never in view anywhere before.

The collection sets its tone by leading off with "Mr. Fiddlehead," a dandy gem that starts out as a kind of mystery, appears to turn into a weird, but touching tale of childhood fantasy surviving into sophisticated adulthood (see earlier comments), and finishes with a neat stab of Carroll's literary stiletto through the reader's ribs deep into the most secret places of his or her heart.

All the stories are superb entertainment and once started I found myself reading it from cover to cover, both material new and familiar, and you will likely do the same. But, as it's a reviewer's obligation, I'll run over some that struck me with particular force.

"The Fall Collection" and "Friend's Best Man" and "A Wheel in the Desert, the Moon on Some Swings" are sensitive explorations of impending death. The first is about the looming extinction of one brave child and perhaps that of the whole human race. The second observes a man at the end of a life which, when viewed from near its end, strikes him as having been led far, far too carefully, and the third is a genuinely profound exploration of a man who knows he will outlive his ability to see. All of these offer peculiarly Carrollian spins on hope, which are particularly encouraging because they are arrived at with great honesty in extremely dark places.

On the other hand, there are few better than Carroll at laying out absolute despair, and he masterfully does just that in "A Flash in the Pants" wherein a man undergoes a horrendous satori concerning his profound personal mediocrity; "Post-Graduate," a truly cruel little fantasy about the universe handing a yuppie his just desserts; and "Waiting to Wave," a grimly unflinching stare at a poor sap unable to get over a lost love.

Great fun is had with his understanding and tolerant take on cynicism in "The Life of my Crime," a sort of Pinnochio for grownups, but a deal less mercy is shown concerning the same in "The Dead Love You."

Finally, one intriguing aspect of Carroll's imaginings well represented in this book is his repeated return to complex tales involving characters unexpectedly encountering cabalistic Epiphanies and thus finding themselves all of a sudden deeply involved in the backstage machinations of the cosmos. Sometimes, as in "Uh-Oh City," which takes the Mary Poppins notion way past Disney, and "The Sadness of Detail," in which God (and therefore us) has a serious problem, everything seems to work out fairly well, even if the world will be a little creepier and more dangerous from now on, but in "Black Cocktail," the new novelette with which Carroll brings his collection to a spectacular fin-

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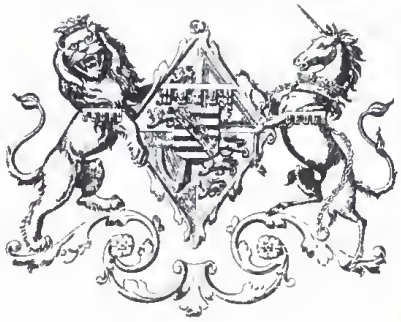
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ish, things take a dazzling number of increasingly sinister turns. It is the author at the top of his form, and it juggles your mind with astounding grace.

The Panic Hand will serve as a fine introduction to this marvelous author's work, but be warned (as they say in the potato chip ads) — once you get one taste of it you'll never stop wanting more!

Sheep by Simon Magnin; (Borealis, GA; hardcover; 337 pp; $21.99)

This first novel by Simon Magnin presents another basic reason why the attitude of those who firmly rule out the fantastic in their dealings with day-to-day life ranges from being impractical to downright dangerous. It's an unwise policy for the simple reason that a big chunk of that day-to-day life is fantastic. What about madness? The other asks: What about the bizarre and resoundingly pointless damage caused by evil people? What about the random chaos and misdirectings and overturnings caused by the unregulated lotteries of genetic distributions and financial fluctuations?

Add to this the confusion caused by the erratic psychic connections and lurking ghosts (this is a ghost story, albeit one subtly staged) which are part of the universe presented in *Sheep* and it is certain that down-to-earth solutions will tend to carry very small weight.

The novel is a constant montage of past and present actions interacting, and starts with the dream of an event that makes no sense at all so far as any human involved with it is concerned, namely the death by drowning during a holiday vacation of little Ruthie Tullian, daughter of James and Adele and younger sister of Sam.

The dream is James's, perhaps his thousandth version. It takes place years and years later and, besides conjuring up the event, it immediately brings on center stage two of the nastiest and most destructive linked emotions in the human repertoire: guilt and blame.

Why didn't Adele stop screaming for him, for James, for her husband to come and help? Why didn't she simply get Ruthie's small body across her shoulders and just swim her to safety?

He rises from the bed, full of bitterness and then, standing in the cold bathroom attempting to recover from his nightmare, he stares into the mirror at "a thirty-two-year-old man who had let his daughter die."

Meantime Sam, James's still-living child, has obviously been severely affected by the tragedy, his mind tending always to drift into dark regions. For instance, when he complained of having trouble sleeping, his mother suggested he try counting sheep. Sam took the practice up, but in the following fashion: *"He imagined a great heap of sheep, an enormous pile, reaching up to the sky. They were in a big field, and there was someone throwing new sheep on all the time; their heads hung limply because they were dead. Sam only counted these new sheep. He didn't*

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Books to Look For

Barlowe's Guide to Fantasy, *Wayne Barlowe and Neil Duskis, HarperCollins, Trade and Hardcover $19.95/$27.95.* Yes, I know, my husband again, but really, this is one you won't want to miss if you're any kind of a fantasy fan at all. Follow-up to his best-selling *Barlowe's Guide to Extraterrestrials,* this one illuminates, instead of the great aliens of science fiction, the great characters and creatures of classic fantasy from ancient times to the present day. If you're very, very good, we'll run an excerpt next issue.

Dragon Stone, *Dennis McKeirnan, Roc/Dutton/Signet, Hardcover.* A new, stand-alone novel in his bestselling Mithgar series, Dragon Stone should only enhance the author's reputation as a first-rate crafter of crowd-pleasing fantasy.

The Lost Road, and Other Writings, *J.R.R. Tolkein, Del Rey, mass market $6.99.* In this, the fifth volume of Christopher Tolkein's The History of Middle Earth, Middle Earth is brought up to its state at the writing of The Lord of the Rings. This and the previous four volumes are recommended primarily for the dyed-in-the-wool Tolkein enthusiast or for those who take a serious interest in the history of fantasy writing as we know it.

Expecting Someone Taller, *Tom Holt, Ace, mass market $5.50.* Outside of the redoubtable Terry Pratchett, there's not much in the way of humorous SF or fantasy around. Tom Holt looks as if he's going to change that (after all, he is the author of Who's Afraid of Beowulf?) This book has gotten glowing reviews and looks to be a lot of fun.

The Book of Atrix Wolfe, *Patricia A. McKillip, Ace $5.99.* This hauntingly lovely tale by the World Fantasy Award winning author may well become a classic in its genre and its gorgeous cover by Kuniko Craft should make it a hit among casual book store browsers.

Top Dog, *Jerry Jay Carroll, Ace, Trade Paperback $12.00.* Described by the publisher as "J.R.R. Tolkein meets The Shaggy Dog," this Kafka-esque fantasy in which a top Wall Street executive is transformed overnight into an enormous dog looks like a very entertaining read.

Darkenheight, Book Two of the Watershed Trilogy, *Douglas Niles, Ace Trade Paperback, $13.95.* Second in a traditional High Fantasy series that seems sure to attract this subgenre's numerous fans, Darkenheight continues the tale of The Man of Three Waters as he faces his ultimate destiny.

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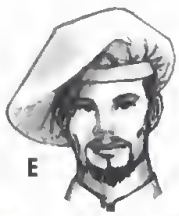
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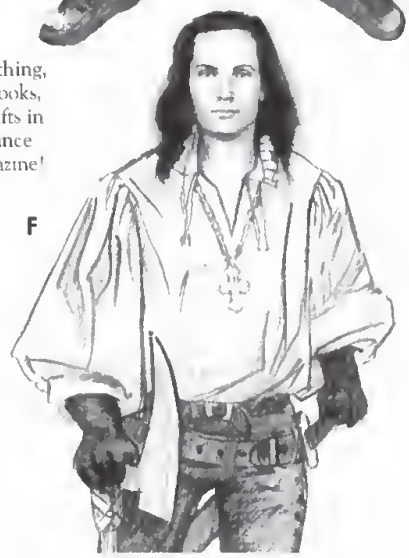
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even try to count the ones that were there already because there were far too many, he just did the sheep the man threw on with his stick."

Adele has found some peace from her dreadful loss in devoting herself ever more intensely to her paintings, which have lately begun to achieve enough recognition to warrant an important upcoming exhibition. The painting are landscapes, very bare ones, but now they're beginning to fill up and get a little busier. More trees, more clouds, and just now, in her latest work, she added some sheep.

Unexpectedly the possibility of a time and place for recovery for them all arrives when Adele's Uncle Simon stumbles across an interesting old house while on a business trip in Wales, buys the thing on impulse and makes a deal with James — whose contracting business has been caught in the downslide of an economic depression — to spend some time in the peace and quiet of the country while he fixes the place up. Once the job's done and everybody's got themselves sorted out it's understood that a good position will be awaiting James in Simon's rapidly growing fast food empire.

At first all seems to go well but, slowly, both from macabre, hinting things dug up from the ground in James's restoration work such as oddly charred sheep bones and bits of knitted blue wool and from clearer and clearer hints dropped by neighbors about the sinister doings of the house's previous inhabitants, the Charpentiers, it begins to look as if their situation is taking on classically gothic overtones.

Did Raoul Charpentier push a woman over the cliff to her death during a party turned bacchanal? What is the real meaning of the weird diary scratched into the plaster walls of the room where Raoul confined his wife when she supposedly went mad? And what really did happen to the Charpentiers' children?

Altogether *Sheep* is a fine, gruesome romp with:

"Much of madness, and more of sin and horror the soul of the plot!"

As Eddy Poe would have put it, shocking revelations abound, slow dawnings chill the reader, sudden starts and jaw-droppings guaranteed. Get yourself some nice snacks, wait for a spooky night full of juicy, window-shaking gusts of rain, then cuddle up with *Sheep* for a straight read through followed by attentive harkening to creaks in the hallway as you try to get to sleep!

***The Book of Hyperborea**, by Clark Ashton Smith; edited by Will Murray; (Necronomicon Press, RI; softcover; 173 pp; $9.95)*

Necronomicon Press has followed up its excellent *Tales of Zothique* with *The Book of Hyperborea*, another meticulously complete collection of a fantasy cycle by Clark Ashton Smith.

The name Hyperborea originally came from a Greek dream of a lovely land located so far to the north that it was safely tucked behind the freezing arctic winds and therefore existed in perpetual summer. Smith's version of the place is by no means so gentle, being a grim, chilly realm of monster glaciers and frozen wastes inhabited by a singularly tough and leathery folk with a fine feel for irony doubtless inspired and constantly sharpened by the vagaries of their merciless environment and the tricks of their sly gods, headed by the squat, sleepy-eyed Tsathoggua, an entity part toad, part bat, and entirely untrustworthy.

Throughout their whole history of production, the Hyperborean stories were outstandingly hard to sell and Smith's letters are full of accounts of their rejections and iffy placings. The main reason for this was probably their droll and often downright satirical tone. The monstrous beings that haunted Hyperborea and plagued its luckless but doughty inhabitants were certainly as horrific as any reader of *Weird Tales* could possibly wish for, and the plots of the stories in the cycle were abundantly packed with dire events and appalling resolutions, but Smith's lopsided, deep-lined grin shows through these epics even more than with his other fantasies and I suspect it made the editors wonder if he was actually making fun of them and their genre.

Also, as Will Murray points out in his excellent Introduction, the gods Smith set up to rule over benighted Hyperborea were not at all the freezingly remote types whose spooky indifference to mankind so effec-

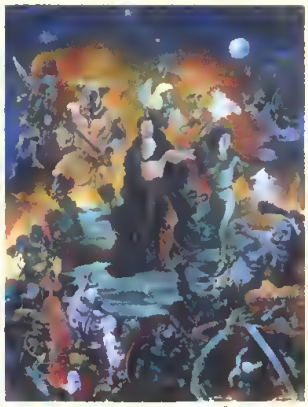
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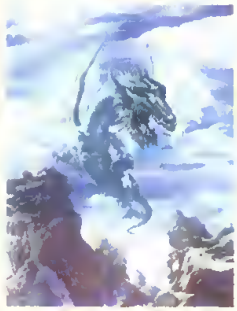
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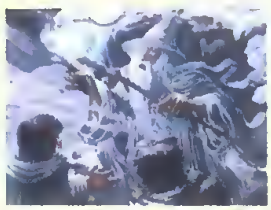


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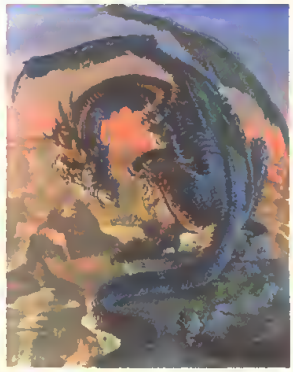


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tively chilled the marrow in the bones of Lovecraft's readers; these bozos were down and dirty as Greek gods, always in your face, forever puttering with you on a highly personal level because they're really interested to see how much you can take before you break. Also, betwixt themselves, the behavior of the creatures was unendingly sexy when it was not downright ribald.

Of course the human Hyperboreans were guilty of the same sort of disreputable goings-on and were, when all is said and done, a rascally lot productive of many outstanding thieves — and I strongly suspect they seldom bathed.

Even their leading magus and philosopher, the fabled and puissant wizard of Eibon, quite casually reveals himself to be a thoroughgoing rogue. Really, how can one be expected to take such a batch of rapscallions seriously? Especially if you're built along the lines of Farnsworth Wright, the prim-looking editor of *Weird Tales* magazine. I have studied photographs of him and it is easy for me to see him earnestly tut-tutting over titles like "The Theft of the Thirty-Nine Girdles" or "The Weird of Avoosi Wuthoqquan."

But I hope *you* won't be put off by all this naughtiness because that would be depriving yourself of some of the drollest fantasy



penned, and that would be a pity. To those of you who are already considerable collectors of Smithiana, don't consider this a rehash anthology. It contains hard-to-locate material, the most spectacular being the original text of "The Coming of the White Worm." It contains all the bits Farnsworth Wright made Smith whittle away in order to make it a snappier read. Also Murray's intro and postscript are both full of goodies.

Gahan Wilson

Glenraven *by Marion Zimmer Bradley and Holly Lisle, Baen Books, New York, 400 pp., hardcover, $23.00.*

Sometimes the premise of a fantasy novel is so delightful and engaging that we are immediately pulled into the story. *Glenraven* has such a premise. Jayjay Bennington is contemplating the failure of her third marriage when on impulse she wanders into her local bookstore and finds herself in front of the travel section. As she scans the rows of Fodor's guides and considers escaping her disastrous life with a little vacation, her eyes fix on the Fodor's guide to Glenraven, "the best-kept secret in Europe." While she's never heard of this small European country, she quickly becomes enraptured. Looking over the vivid, evocative photos, she imagines she can smell the flowers and the freshly mown hay. The book explains that Glenraven has kept its borders closed since before the time of Columbus, and has only recently opened its borders to a few chosen travelers. It is a land where the medieval way of life has been preserved.

Of course what Jayjay doesn't know is that Glenraven is also a land of magic, and that the Fodor's guide she buys is enchanted. The guide has selected her. She is, indeed, a "chosen" traveler. When Jayjay tells her friend Sophie about her plans and shows her the book, Sophie feels compelled to ask to come along. And so the two

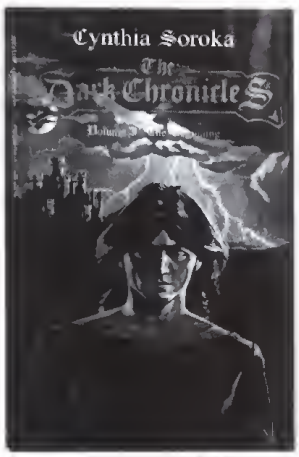
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Deer Maiden and Selkie Skins: Tales of Shamans, Shape-shifters, and the Animal People

ACCORDING TO ANCIENT CELTIC TEXTS, MERLIN (THE WISE AND WILY MAGICIAN of King Arthur's court) goes mad after the disastrous Battle of Arderydd and flees into the forest. He lives like the wild boars and the wolves, eating roots and berries, sleeping in the rain. In the Welsh *Black Book of Carmarthen* he writes, "Ten years and two score have I been moving along through twenty bouts of madness with wild ones in the wild . . . only lack keeps me company now." Through his madness, he learns the speech of animals and the secrets of wood and stone. When he emerges from the forest at last, he has come fully into his magical powers; his fits of madness are honed into trances and visions foretelling the future. The Irish tell a similar tale of Suibhne, a warrior cursed in battle, forced to flee to the wilderness. In the shape of a bird, he travels for many years in a state of anguish and madness—but by the time he returns home again, transformed back into his own human shape, he has gained certain magical powers and a strong rapport with the beasts of the woods.

These stories compare with countless tales to be found in cultures around the globe, and give us a glimpse into actual shamanistic practices of old (recorded by such scholars as Frazer, Campbell, and Eliades). Shamanism, according to Mircea Eliades (in his classic study *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstacy*), "is a religious phenomenon characteristic of Siberian and Ural-Altaic peoples; the word shaman itself is of Tungus origin. But shamanism must not be considered as limited to those countries. It is encountered, for example, in southeast Asia, Oceania, and among many South and North American aboriginal tribes A shaman [Eliades continues in *Man, Myth and Magic*, #91] is recognized as such only after having received two kinds of instruction. The first is ecstatic (for example, dreams, visions, trances); the second is traditional (shamanic techniques, names and functions of spirits, mythology and genealogy of the clan, secret language.)"

Terri Windling's artwork is often inspired by mythology, particularly myths of shape-shifters and animal-spirits. The "Deer Maiden," a creature found in old folk-tales throughout the world, was created for an English art exhibition on the theme of Metamorphosis.



The role of shaman varies from culture to culture, but generally he or she is a sacred figure, a healer, prophet, and/or magician, whose powers awaken after an arduous process of initiation. Like Merlin or Suibhne, initiates may endure a long period of madness and deprivation, journeying into the wilderness and living an elemental existence; or they might undergo a mystic death and resurrection, returning to the world with new flesh, blood, and bones, as well as new knowledge.

In myths and ancient pictographs, the shaman is often characterized by the distinctive ability to change himself from human into animal shape. Sometimes this change is a literal one, human flesh transformed into animal flesh or covered over by animal skin; in other accounts, the soul leaves the shaman's unconscious body to enter into the body of an animal, fish, or bird. In T.H. White's *Once and Future King*, such shamanistic practices are evoked by Merlin's preparation of young Arthur for his role as king. The boy learns to take the shape of animals and to live as animals live. In White's story, published for children, these scenes are rendered with gentle wit and charm—yet they mirror older, darker mythic stories, ones where the lines are intentionally blurred between the human and animal states, between civilization and wilderness, between sanity and madness, and finally between madness and magic.

It is not only shamans who have such powers according to tales from around the globe. "Shape-shifting," transforming from human shape to one or many animal forms, is part of a mythic and story-telling tradition stretching back over thousands of years. The gods of various mythologies are credited with this ability, as are the heroes of the great epics or sagas and humble oral fairy

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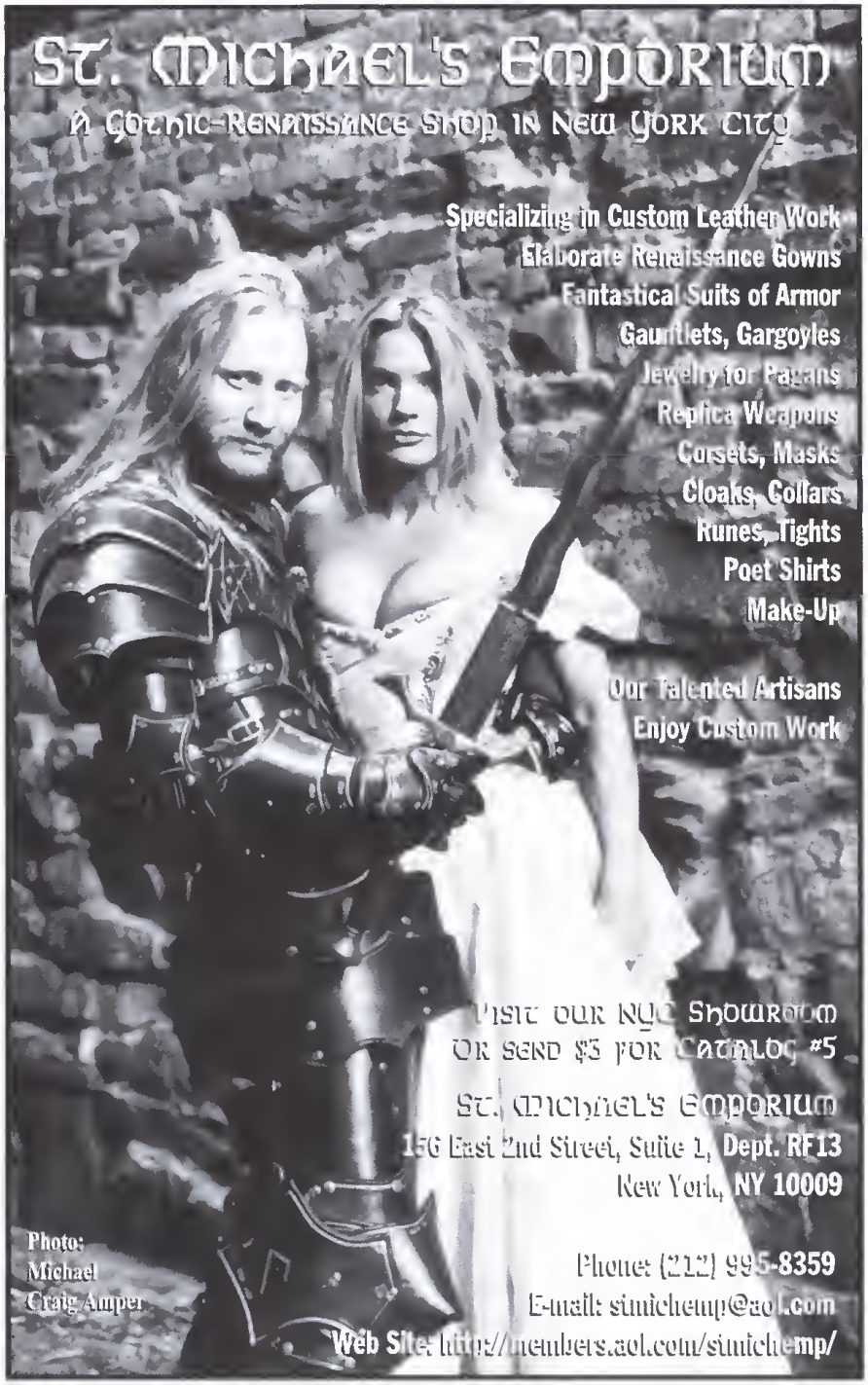
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tales alike. In Nordic myth, Odin could change his shape into any beast or bird; in Greek myth, Zeus often assumed animal shape in his relentless pursuit of young women. There is evidence of a "bear cult" in ancient Greece; its initiates, all young girls, were allowed to roam wild and filthy, dressed only in bear skins and as playful as young cubs. Cave paintings dating from the Upper Paolithic show winged men and women with long bird beaks; in the cave of *Les Trois Frères*, a dancing man has antlers rising from his brow. Cernunnos, the lord of animals in Celtic mythology, wore the shape of a stag, and also the shape of a man with a heavy rack of horns; one of the earliest depictions of this "Horned God" comes from a rock carving in northern Italy, approximately fourth century BC. The dragons of China were shape-shifters who could take both male and female form; some married and bore children whose descendants still claim dragon ancestry. In the *Odyssey*, Homer tells the tale of Proteus—a famous soothsayer who would not give away his knowledge unless forced to do so. Menelaus came upon him while he slept, and held onto him tightly as he shape-shifted into a lion, a snake, a leopard, a bear, and so on. Defeated, Proteus returned to his own shape, and Menelaus won the answers to his questions.

This story is echoed in the magical Celtic tale of the resourceful Gwion Bach—a young man who went on to become the great Welsh poet Taliesin. Gwion Bach stole the gift of prophesy from the cauldron of the witch Ceridwen—and then he fled, with the furious old witch in hot pursuit. He transformed himself into a hare; the witch transformed into a hound. He turned into a fish, she turned into an otter, and so on and so on until Gwion Bach became a grain of wheat. The witch became a hen, gobbled him up, and gave birth to him (as the infant Taliesin) nine months later. A similar tale is told in the Scottish ballad *Twa Magicians*: one magician (female) is pursued by another (male) and seeks escape in the same fashion. The prize in this case is her maidenhead, which she is determined to keep. In the ballad *Tam Lin*, the hero undergoes a Protean series of transformations: He becomes a bear, a poisonous snake, a red-hot brand of iron . . . but his lady love bravely stands her ground and holds tightly onto him. When Tam Lin regains his own true shape, she's won him from the Queen of Faery.

Not all shape-shifting is voluntary. The werewolf of European folklore is a cursed and tragic figure. (While in India, we find were-tigers lurking; in Africa, leopard and hyena men.) In the fifth century, Herodotus tells us that all the men of a certain Scythian tribe became wolves for a few days each year. In his *Natural History*, Pliny recounts (somewhat skeptically) this tale of the Antaei in Arcadia: Each year one man is chosen by lot and taken to the shores of a sacred lake. His clothes are removed, hung on an oak, and he swims to the woods on the lake's other side.

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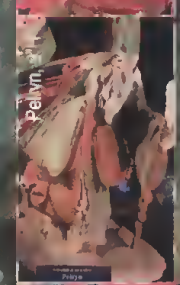

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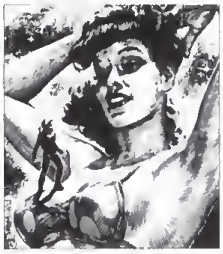
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He then runs wild with the wolves, half-forgetting his human kin. But if he manages to refrain from eating human flesh for a full nine years he may cross the lake, put on his clothes, and regain man-shape again. In medieval Christian legendry, St. Natalis cursed the people of Ossory, who all became wolves for seven long years. A priest met one of the penitent sinners, a wolf who addressed him in human speech, imploring him to please come quickly and shrive his dying wolf-wife. In her medieval *Lais*, Marie de France tells of a female werewolf in the forests of old Brittany: She was a noblewoman, an unfaithful wife cursed by her lover's touch. Another French tale concerns a woman who buys a green belt from a odd-looking peddler. Her husband forbids her to wear the thing, but she cannot resist the belt's strange appeal. Once on, it will not come off again, and the poor woman becomes a wolf every night for the next seven years.

The transformed husband, wife, or lover is a common theme in old fairy tales. *Beauty and the Beast*, from 18th-century France, is probably the best known of the many "animal bridegroom" stories to be found around the world. The Beast of this tale has been depicted by countless illustrators over 200-odd years: sometimes he is lion-like, bear-like, serpent-like, or even pig-like; and yet, curiously, whatever his shape the Beast remains far more compelling than the man that he later becomes. In *East of the Sun, West of the Moon* from Scandinavia, the heroine is actually married to the Beast (who is, in this case, a big white bear) at the *beginning* of the story, before he regains his human shape. Each night he comes to the marriage bed changed back into his human form. His wife is forbidden to see his face, but of course she soon breaks this taboo and must complete a series of arduous tasks before she wins him back again. In *Brother and Sister* from Germany, two siblings flee their wicked stepmother through a dark, fearsome, enchanted wood. The path of escape lies across three streams, and at each crossing the brother stops to drink. Each time the sister begs him not to, but at the third stream he cannot resist. He bends down to the water in the shape of a man, and rises again in the shape of a stag. Thereafter, the sister and her brother-stag live alone at the heart of the forest. A king comes to hunt the magnificent stag—but it's the sister he claims and carries from the woods. Eventually, with his sister's help, the boy resumes his true shape. In *The White Deer*, found in Germany, Scandinavia, France, and the Scottish highlands, a wellborn girl is cursed in her crib by a slighted fairy. She must not see the sun before her wedding day . . . or disaster will strike. On her way to be wed, the sun penetrates her carriage; she turns into a deer and disappears through the wildwood. She is hunted and wounded by her own fiancé as she roams sadly through the forest.

Not all transformations are from human to animal shape—many tales recount the reverse. The Great Selkie of Sule Skerry, described in Scottish legends and ballads, is "a man upon a dry land, a selkie [seal] in the sea," and he leaves a human maid sighing on the shore, pregnant with his child. Irish legends tell of men who marry seal or otter women, hiding their animal skins from them so that they cannot return to the water. Generally these woman bear several sons, but pine away for their own true home. If they find the skin, they return to the sea with barely a thought for those left behind. In "The Otter Woman," Irish poet Mary O'Malley writes: *He never asked why she always walked/By the shore, what she craved/Why she never cried when every wave/Crescendoed like an orchestra of bones./She stood again on the low bridge/The night of the full moon./One sweet, deep breath and she slipped in/Where the river fills the sea./She saw him clearly in the street light—his puzzlement./Rid of him she let out/One low, strange cry*

Japanese fairy tales warn of the danger of kitsune, the fox-wife. According to Kiyoshi Nozaki's extensive book on kitsune legends (*Kitsune: Japan's Fox of Mystery, Romance and Humor*), the creature is a shape-shifter, a trickster, and highly dangerous; the fox takes the form of a beautiful woman, but to wed her brings madness and death. Ellen Steiber points out (in her story "The Fox Wife," from *Ruby Slippers, Golden Tears*) that the symptoms now attributed to mental illness were once thought of as fox possession in old Japan; a doctor in the Shimane Prefecture treated a

The "Fox Wife" (married to an unsuspecting human) is a creature who can be beneficent or malign according to ancient legends. In old Japan, "fox possession" was the diagnosis for wild, wayword or discontented young women.



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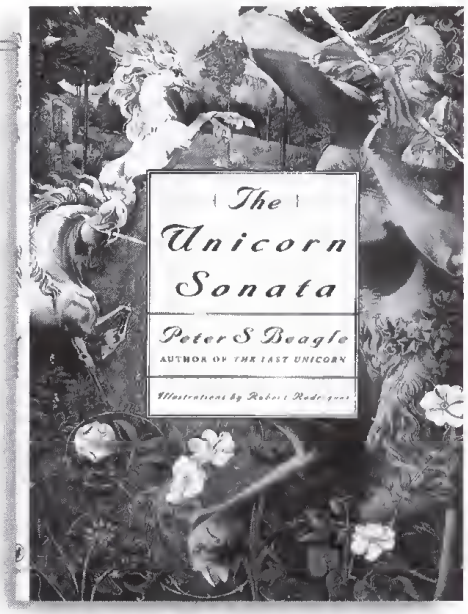
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number of such cases as late as 1892. In Africa we find lion-wives who are equally dangerous. In a Mbundu tale, a young lioness is dressed and groomed by her lion kin until she resembles a delectable young woman. She marries a wealthy man, intending to kill him as he sleeps and steal his cattle away, but a child witnesses her nightly transformations and blows the whistle. The cat-wives of English and Scottish tales are more benign and charming creatures. A man discovers his beautiful, silent young wife is actually a cat in disguise; at the urging of his mother or neighbors, he reluctantly gets rid of the girl—and then regrets the deed, missing her cheerful presence and affectionate nature. In Tibet, a frog- husband is an unexpected source of joy to a shy young bride. He is not a man disguised as a frog—he is a frog disguised as a man. When his young wife burns his frog skin to keep her lover in the shape she prefers, the frog-husband loses his magical powers, resigning himself to ordinary human life with a gentleman's grace.

In Native American legends, deer maidens, like fox- and lion-wives, are dangerous. In a Lakota version of the tale, a young man walking far from camp meets a beautiful woman alone in the woods. It is (he thinks) the very woman he's been courting, who has rejected him. Now she is talking to him with evident favor, looking lovely in her doe-skin robe. While they talk, he playfully threads the end of a rope through a hole in the limb of her robe—until a dog appears and barks at her. The young woman panics and turns to flee, returning to her own deer-shape . . . but the rope holds the deer maiden fast around her foreleg. "Let me go!" she cries. "If you let me go, I'll give you magical power." The man releases her warily, and the deer maiden disappears through the wood. He vomits profusely, sick with the knowledge that if he'd made love to her he would have gone mad like other young men who'd encountered or hunted the deer. After this, the unfortunate man lives alone, plagued by sudden fits of wild, whistling, deer-like behavior. Yet the deer-woman keeps her promise and gives him this ability: his skill with horses and other four-footed creatures is unsurpassed.

The Elk Man is another dangerous and seductive animal shape-shifter. In a study of the story (*The Lakota Narratives of Ella Deloria*), Julian Rice writes: "Certain Lakota men had the power of the elk from a vision or dream. The Elk power was useful in war, but Elk power was most notable for its erotic influence on women." Clark Wissler (*Some Dakota Myths*) notes the use of elk charms as an aphrodisiac. "Another powerful charm was made from a mirror. In a small mirror was drawn the figure of an elk and around the edge a zigzag to represent lightning. Through the middle of the mirror a broken line was drawn to represent the trail of the elk. In use the mirror was flashed so that the beam would fall upon the girl. The trail in the drawing implies that the girl must follow the footsteps of the owner of the mirror." In a Pawnee version of the Elk Man tale, a certain man of a certain tribe has the ability to attract any woman. His amorous adventures are so plentiful that there are soon only a few women left with their reputations intact. The other men of the tribe decide the young man must be gotten rid of, and persuade his reluctant brother to help them, promising him riches in return. The Elk Man is killed, but his sister steals his head and an arm, and hides them in the forest. With these things, the Elk Man regenerates himself, and comes home to his brother's tipi. He is not angry with the brother, but with the tribe, which has not fulfilled its side of the bargain. Elk Man goes to the council tent and demands the riches they promised his brother. Fearful now, the council produces many horses, tipis, and fine blankets. The young man takes them home and the siblings live together in luxury. After that, the narrative concludes, the young man "fascinated all the women so much there was not a single good woman left in that tribe. And then it was clear the young man was really an elk, and it was beyond their power to kill him, and neither could they put a stop to his attraction for women. They finally gave in and said no more. That is all."

The story of the woman who marries a bear is found throughout North America. In

Continued on page 82



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BY DAN PEREZ

Dark fantasy comes to life in thirteen creepy films you never saw.

THIS IS ANOTHER IN A SERIES OF ARTICLES I'M WRITING ABOUT GOOD MOVIES, WHICH, for some reason or another, are seen less often than they should be. This time, we'll be examining the genre of dark fantasy, which includes (but is not limited to) horror movies.

Dark fantasy and horror movies have always been the black sheep of the cinematic family and, in the past decade, the genre has taken a really problematic turn in the form of endless formulaic splatter films populated by bogeymen like Freddy Krueger. This trend, while popular among teens, is enough to make many people turn away from the genre as a whole, which is a shame, because good films are still being made. Academy Award-winner *The Silence of the Lambs* is a horror movie in the best tradition of the genre.

There are lesser-seen gems, too, and that's the focus of this article. Just about everyone has seen *The Silence of the Lambs*, of course, as well as greats like *The Exorcist*, *Dracula*, *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *Alien*, and others.

The criteria for inclusion in this list? The films had to be currently available for video rental (one of the great ghost movies of all time, Jack Clayton's *The Innocents*, is still inexplicably unavailable in video format), and they had to be, in my estimation at least, underseen. I also decided to include a few films that stretched the boundaries of the fantastic. Finally, I've chosen a couple of movies that pack a real wallop of gore, so I've noted that, as necessary.

So here they are—a baker's dozen of movies that will shock, terrify, and delight. They should all be seen more often than they are.

Freaks (1932, 64 minutes, black & white), directed by Tod Browning of *Dracula* fame, should be seen nowadays if only to remind us that a film like this could never be made in these politically correct times. It was pretty controversial in its own day, as well, frequently banned and then released under the slightly less problematic title of *Nature's Mistakes*. This tale of love and revenge among circus sideshow performers has the singular distinction of using real human oddities in its cast, from Siamese twins to microcephalics to Prince Randian, the "human torso." When a scheming "normal" couple plans to murder a rich midget for his money, the other sideshow performers (portrayed for most of the movie as a empathetic extended family) enact a terrifying vengeance.

After more than 60 years, *Freaks* remains both unique and powerful. A must-see.

Eraserhead (1977, 90 minutes, black & white) is David Lynch's surreal, disturbing tour de force, and was a popular attraction on the midnight-movie circuit. This is one of those movies that must be seen more than once to begin to appreciate its bizarre, dreamlike nature and superior black & white imagery. The story, such as there is one, concerns Henry (Jack Nance) and Mary (Charlotte Stewart) and their attempts to raise their horrifying yet oddly sympathetic mutant baby. Set against a bleak, post-industrial wasteland and filmed in claustrophobic near-darkness, *Eraserhead* draws you into a world where repugnant fantasy seamlessly blends with oppressive reality. A stunning artistic achievement, considering the shoestring budget Lynch (*Twin Peaks*) had to work with. Definitely not for the squeamish.

Black Sabbath (1964, 99 minutes, color), is an atmospheric anthology directed by Mario Bava (if you rent his first film, *Black Sunday*, by mistake, you'll find it a treat, too) which stars Boris Karloff. It consists of three tales, all hosted by a jocular Karloff (although the dialogue in these linking sequences is pretty corny). The first story,



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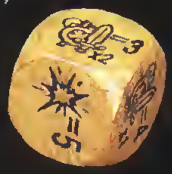
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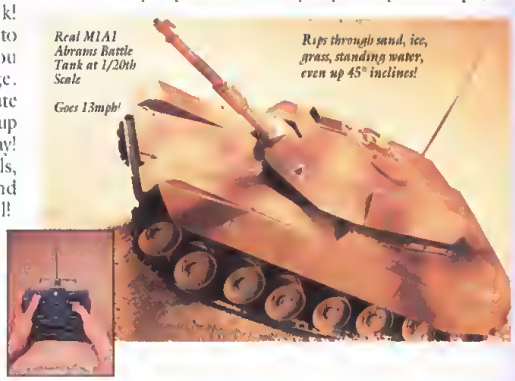


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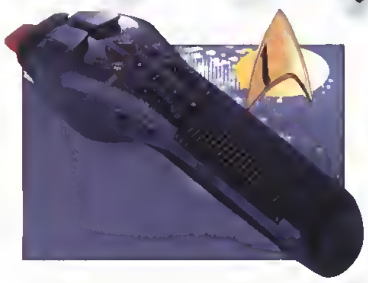
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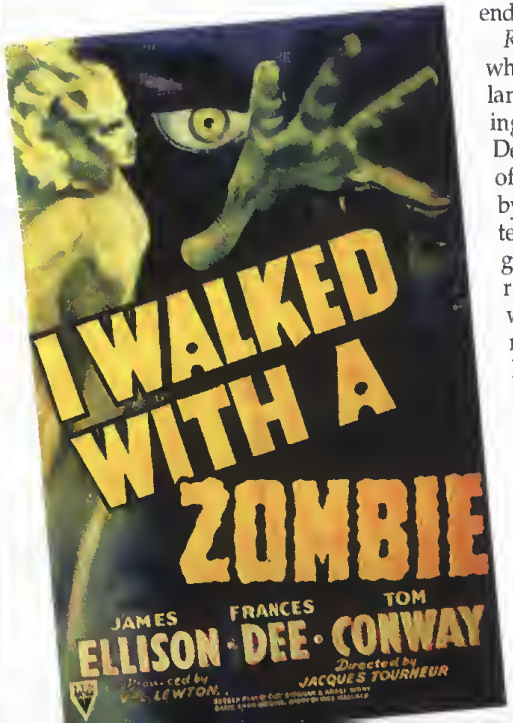
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Above: Richard Johnson steadies Julie Harris in the 1963 ghost film The Haunting. *Val Lewton's 1943 film* I Walked with a Zombie *(below) is filled with "sultry" atmosphere.*

"A Drop of Water," is based on a story by Chekhov. It features a nurse who steals a ring off a corpse and comes to regret it. Some genuinely tingly moments and a terrific ending. The second tale, "The Telephone," is the weakest entry, with a woman haunted by phone calls from a dead man. The third entry, "The Wurdalak," based on a Tolstoy tale, is the best, with Karloff starring as a creepy vampiric grandfather who is forced to feed on the blood of his loved ones.

The Haunting (1963, 112 minutes, black & white) is just about the best haunted house movie ever committed to film, based as it is on Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, a National Book Award winner and probably the best haunted house novel ever written. Still, it's easy to forget *The Haunting*'s deliciously subtle chills in these days of all-out special effects movies like *Poltergeist*. Director Robert Wise (*The Day the Earth Stood Still*) combines sound, chiaroscuro lighting, unusual camera angles, discordant music, and splendid performances by his cast to create a memorable tale about supernatural investigators who take up residence in 90-year-old Hill House, which is most assuredly not sane. Julie Harris is terrific as the repressed, lonely Eleanor, and Claire Bloom is good as the ESP-endowed Theo. The ghosts of Hill House are never shown, but you won't have any doubt as to their existence by the end of this shivery masterpiece.

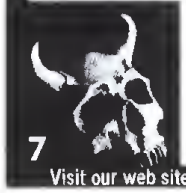


Repulsion (1965, 105 minutes, black & white) is Roman Polanski's first English-language film, and it follows the harrowing experiences of a woman (Catherine Deneuve) as she spirals into the depths of madness. The woman is forced to stay by herself in her apartment while her sister is on vacation, and the dwelling grows increasingly menacing: cracks ripple up the walls, arms burst out of walls to clutch her, and a shadowy rapist attacks her. The explanation for her dementia (which turns murderous in one hair-raising sequence) is only hinted at until the final frames of the film, in which Polanski reveals everything in a quiet, stunning finale. Masterfully directed by the controversial director, *Repulsion* will stay with you long after it's over.

Dead Alive (1992, 104 minutes, color) is the gore film to end all gore films. If you can handle the fountains of



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Tod Browning's Freaks *is an unexpectedly compassionate tale of love and revenge.*

blood and entrails (and be warned, I'm not exaggerating here), you'll also see that it's a clever black comedy, as well. Peter Jackson, who also directed *Heavenly Creatures* and *The Frighteners*, actually plays the gore for laughs for the most part, creating memorable Rube Goldberg-esque sequences as his hapless protagonists try to escape from a house full of flesh-eating zombies. Unlike the zombies in, say, *Night of the Living Dead*, which could be killed by destroying the brain, the only way to stop Jackson's zombies is to, well, *puree* them. This film gives a whole new meaning to the expression "over the top." To borrow from Joe Bob Briggs, the movie has priest-fu, zombie baby-fu and even Oedipus-fu. Look for the unrated version; the toned-down "R" version doesn't compare.

The Seventh Seal (1956, 96 minutes, black & white) is Ingmar Bergman's classic existential masterpiece. The story follows a disillusioned knight (Max von Sydow) as he makes his way home from the Crusades. The plague is ravaging Europe, and when Death appears to take the knight, the two agree to a game of chess, which buys the knight extra time in which to try to accomplish something significant. Bergman examines his favorite themes along the way: death, love, existence, sin, innocence, and alienation. There's even a sparkle of humor here and there, such as when a roguish actor, confronted with Death, pleads for special dispensation. One of the all-time great movies.

Cronos (1993, 95 minutes, color) is an offbeat take on vampirism that won the Critics Week Best Picture prize at Cannes. Directed by Guillermo Del Toro, the film is about an antiques dealer (Federico Luppi) who discovers the long-lost Cronos device, a bug-like mechanism built by an alchemist 400 years ago. It promises eternal life, but with a steep price: The user must drink blood after using the device. Another brand of trouble ensues when the antiques dealer finds that someone else wants the Cronos device as well. Stylish direction and crisp, moody cinematography by Guillermo Navarro.

I Walked with a Zombie (1943, 69 minutes, black & white) is a terrific movie saddled with an overly sensational title. A collaboration between producer Val Lewton and director Jacques Tourneur (they made the original *Cat People*, which is also a great film),



this movie follows a nurse (Frances Dee) as she takes a job in the West Indies caring for a woman (Christine Gordon) who may or may not be a zombie. Drenched in sultry Caribbean atmosphere, the movie also generates some chills, in part due to the presence of Darby Jones as a wide-eyed zombie guardian.

Sisters (1973, 93 minutes, black & white) is one of Brian DePalma's earlier films, and contains the first of his Hitchcock-inspired sequences (in this case, lifted from Hitch's *Rear Window*). But it's also a gripping psychological thriller, as well. Margot Kidder plays a Siamese twin who is separated in her teens from her (now dead) sister, and who harbors a dark secret. DePalma pulls off a neat trick in this film, persuading the audience to root for the perpetrator and accomplice to a vicious murder, as they conceal evidence just seconds before the arrival of a witness (Jennifer Salt) and the police. Things escalate to a terrifying finale and a bizarre, amusing epilogue.

The Brood (1979, 90 minutes, color), directed by David Cronenberg (*The Fly*), hits squarely in some of Cronenberg's favorite thematic territory: medicine gone terribly wrong. Oliver Reed plays a radical therapist whose theory of "psychoplasmics" involves encouraging patients to produce physical manifestations of their anxieties. One patient develops boils, and another develops lymphosarcoma, but the star patient (played with zeal by Samantha Eggar) carries things to parthenogenic extremes. Great performances and some genuinely gruesome scenes make for an unsettling but effective tale.

Curse of the Demon (1958, 83 minutes, black & white) is another fine film by Jacques Tourneur, based on the M.R. James' classic story "Casting the Runes." Dana Andrews plays a skeptical investigator who refuses to believe that a series of violent deaths is the result of demon-summoning by a malevolent cult leader (Niall MacGinnis); that is, until the cult leader passes him a scrap of paper inscribed with runes, and events grow increasingly menacing. Wonderfully produced, with Tourneur's trademark atmosphere and suspense, and terrific demon-summoning effects by Wally Veevers. A must-see.

The Blood on Satan's Claw (1971, 93 minutes, color) is another good movie saddled with an overly sensational title (the original title was *Satan's Skin*). The devil's skeleton is unearthed in a rural community in 17th-century England, but it disappears, and soon children are sprouting ugly patches of fur and nasty claws, from which a murderous cult of devil-worshipping teens begins to assemble a patchwork Satan. It sounds a bit far-fetched, but director Piers Haggard wisely underplays things, allowing the suspense to build credibly. There's also plenty of atmosphere and period detail. Linda Hayden is a standout as the seductive leader of the coven. ❧

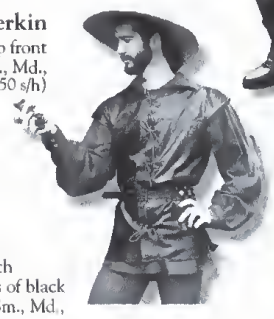
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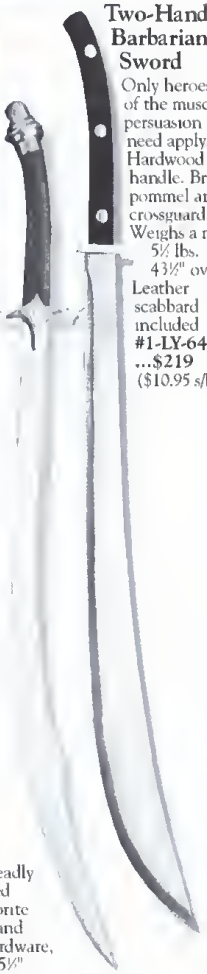
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SCREAM
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Soon the sheriff will come. He'll bring Ed or Carlos or one I don't know. They'll say Old Gran'ma's crazy. I hate that name, but they'll call me Old Gran'ma. You let it start; let it go a day or two, you thinkin' it will pass, but it don't. You're stuck with Old Gran'ma just because you never made a fuss. It's not fair. You look around and nobody calls you Angie no more, or Angela, even the ones you come up with; even Herbert unless he wants some, but that's not much no more, and even then you think, Angie tonight, but it'll be Old Gran'ma tomorrow. You wonder why you don't tell him to stop it; call you Angie, but you know Herbert, he does what he wants; it would cause a quarrel. He wouldn't eat all day, except what he could sneak without you see. Herbert would sulk. Herbert and that cat, no wonder he thought it was the luck.

Sheriff, I'll say, it was Herbert's idea. He told me to take the quarter, he got his part of the luck out of it in the war and none since. He thought the cat was the luck he needed because of that one white foot: *all black, bad luck; a white foot, good luck*. What'd I want with that cat anyway? Hadn't he already named it Glamour Puss and then give it to me like it would be mine. You don't name a stray and give it to your wife and say it's yours and it named already. Who wants

WHERE'S THE LUCK?

BY WILLIAM NABORS

Illustration by Janet Aulisio

Some people have it, some people don't.

I followed him out and watched him spread that stuff in a circle around his mattress. I went back in. I was thinkin' to bury the cat and stay...

a cat they can't name? He could have said feed my cat when he comes around Old Gran'ma. I would have, but he made it a gift, and then had to trade me the quarter.

Sheriff, I'll tell him, it started with this heat. We was sittin' on the porch late Sunday. It was still over a hundred degrees. The weatherman from Amarillo said the heat was killing sick people, old folks, and fools. He said twenty-four straight days of record heat; seven dead and that just in Texas. We had our feet in a dishpan of water, me in my chair and Herbert in his. You get good shade on this porch, especially of a evenin', but we was both in a sweat. I made tea twice, but never could get it cold, what with the juice goin' on and off like it's been, the Frigidaire don't keep ice. That's when it started; the tea weren't cold. There was just no comfort. I told Herbert we'd have to bring our mattresses out here to sleep, but he said no, we'd quit the ranch; stay with Bobby.

Ranch. Look at Herbert's idea of a ranch — six cows left, these few chickens, twelve acres of dust. We could claim five miles more and who'd care? I don't call this land even, much less a ranch. And Bobby, is he a son? Poor Herbert, he wanted to quit the place and go to Bobby. I had to tell him Bobby's a lot farther than the drive to Amarillo.

What could he say? So we sat there sort of studyin' things, but not so you'd speak about them; just all to yourself, in feelin's, no words. I could tell he was worryin' on Bobby though, so I went soft like I always do. I told him Bobby was probably on the road; he didn't have room for us no way. Herbert he spoke up then. He said it was just as well Bobby couldn't take us, Amarillo was as hot as here and who knew if the truck would make it. I told him I's afraid to take the chance too, the truck never has been reliable.

Sheriff, I'll say, right there's what turned his mind to luck. He kept wantin' to know where our luck was, and he wouldn't hear count your blessing. He had a little whiskey in the kitchen, not half a pint, and he went in after it. He come out and guzzled it right down and started to actin' drunk. That much whiskey don't bother him and I told him so, but he just acted drunker. He wanted me to think he'd had too much so he could squall and then say he don't remember if I throwed it up to him. That's Herbert, play drunk if you got something to fret over. Don't he know I see how he laughs when he's really drunk?

Sheriff, I'll tell him, I had to bring the mattresses out myself, Herbert made like he was drunk as a coot so he could cry about his luck. He crawled on his mattress and boo-hooed like a young'un with colic. That got me soft too; a big old man like him. I sat there with his head in my lap tellin' him over and over how luck can change, but he didn't want to hear it; he just wanted to run on about gettin' so much bad luck. Finally, he fell asleep and I come over to my mattress, but it was hours before I closed an eye: this heat, and I guess I knowed trouble was comin'.

And Sheriff, I'll have to say, we hardly spoke on Monday. Herbert was mad all day. He had luck on his mind still, and it got to workin' on me too. I made biscuits for breakfast; I just wanted to cook something. Seems like we hadn't eat a thing but cereal for days, always with the milk not cold; I thought honey and biscuits would be the thing. It's the breakfast I've always liked best, but Herbert went to fussin' about me makin' it hotter and brung up the tooth he lost on a cold biscuit that time. Damn him, it would have come out anyway, but I've had to hear it all these years. That's really what got me thinkin' so hard about our luck. I make as good a biscuit as anybody, but one rotten tooth breaks, and the rest of my life it's like I can't boil water.

Sheriff, I'll say, he told me it was my quarter and the good luck was mine, so I let him have the cat. It was Tuesday; I didn't think it could get hotter and not be Hell. He had to have a trade. He said there was luck in the quarter for me, but he'd used his up; the cat had the luck he needed. I told him all right, if he believed that-away, I'd trade. It was a game to me, just to wait out this heat and see what was left; if we'd have to quit the place or not. I thought maybe he'd feed the cat now, and it'd walk under his feet ever' step he took, and I wouldn't have to mess with it no more.

Sheriff, I'll tell him, I never believed luck come from quarters your Aunt Alice give you, rabbit foot, cats, horseshoes, or rubbin' a blind man's eyes so you can see out beyond the light and dark; none of it. I just wanted him to take care of his cat, and maybe I'd give the quarter back someday. See, Herbert had to have the trade; he wouldn't just take the cat. He said it was the luck we was swappin'.

Sheriff, I'll say, it was what Herbert wanted. You can see it's not my fault. Didn't he tell me it was my quarter and the luck was mine? I let him have the cat Tuesday. It was Wednesday evenin' before I knowed it would die. I didn't cheat him; I wouldn't do that. What'd I care about the quarter then? I didn't care 'til later. It was sundown when I seen it. Herbert had walked to the mailbox. I could have told him there was no mail; Lewis never stopped, but Herbert was hoping for a new sign of luck, a letter from Bobby maybe, and he'd a gone if he'd seen the jeep go by hisself. I was lookin' down the road after him, and I could see a storm comin', but it weren't there, not then. I looked over at the cat. I seen Herbert get up off his mattress and feel it; then pick it up, already stiff, and bring it for me to see; only he was down to the mailbox and the cat was just sleeping.

Sheriff, I'll have to admit it, I thought I was losing my mind. I give the cat a little shake. He sat up, yawned, and started in to washin' hisself. I wondered how I got the idea he was gonna die. I went inside and there was ice made; the juice had been on a good while, so I fixed a pitcher of lemonade. I carried it to the porch and waited

for Herbert. I turned on the radio and listened to Rudy Hinkle 'til Herbert come. We finished the lemonade, and I brought out the Wheaties and we had cold milk too. Herbert said the luck was better, we had juice, and water pumpin' for the cows; real good signs.

Just that lemonade and all changed things. Herbert got to plannin'. He talked about fixin' the windmill so we could be sure of water. He said maybe we'd be able to trade the truck soon; we ought to have a air conditioner. He said it was a good ranch, you just have to be careful how you run it. Even when the juice went back off, he joked it would be all right if he was in the dark with a young woman. He told me goodnight Angie and not Old Gran'ma, but I knowed it wouldn't last. I'd seen the storm and the cat dead.

Sheriff, I'll tell about the dream. Thursday we slept past nine. We're most always up by seven, and in blisterin' heat like it's been of late, three or four hours is all we ever slept at a time. I couldn't believe it was that hot and the mornin' sun on us s' long, and we'd slept right through, Herbert on his mattress, me on mine, and then woke just at the very same minute. I told him right off — I never thought not to — that I'd dreamed a storm was comin'. It split the house, but I weren't afraid. I sit in my rocker and watched everything blow away but the floor under me; I was all right. I had the quarter in my hand. I could feel the luck holdin' me down while that twister carried off the whole place; everything but me and never even fanned my hair.

Sheriff, I'll say, I was barely awake or I'da never jumped in tellin' him that, even if I'd believed it meant anything, but the way I was, rememberin' it all s' fast, I blurted it out to him. I wanted to hear what he'd say; he's always put a lot of stock by dreams, but he never opened his mouth, just sit and stared at me.

Finally, he got up and come over to my mattress. He bent down and touched my face with just his fingertips. He whispered something, and thinkin' I'd heard wrong, I asked what was it, and he said I'd never know, but I did already. What he'd said was, "You don't help poor Old Gran'ma no more," and what I didn't understand was if he meant I didn't help him, or he didn't help me or what, but I'd heard clear enough and I asked twice more what he meant, but he never would answer. The tears rolled down his cheeks. He grabbed me by the hair, reached back and slapped my face; then walked off callin' his cat. I seen the whole thing, his meanness, like I was standin' outside it. I never felt the blow, but I called him a bastard — he hates that because he was — and he acted like he never heard; just went on yellin' for his cat. I wondered if I was dreamin' still, but the minute I thought it, I knowed better. I saw him plain, hollerin' for Glamour Puss and smacking his lips like milk time; it was real. I thought: *Twice he's hit me now; this and our weddin' night when he made me give him Joe Leonard's name.*

It was then I seen what we'd come to; scared, married forty-eight years, and why? I laughed at us both. Just that minute, I weren't afraid of anything, not the storm, not even a monster; he hit like a child.

Sheriff, I'll say, Herbert cussed and kitty-kittied, but the cat never come to him. It was out back where the morning shade was and him runnin' off to the mailbox beggin' it to follow; surely knowin' it was around the other way, and knowin' the cat was no fool; knowin' too, Lewis never comes 'til after twelve.

Sheriff, I'll tell him, I opened a can of applesauce and one of pork 'n' beans for lunch, but Herbert wouldn't eat. He laid on his mattress in the heat, sweatin' and sulkin' on account of he come back home still callin' it and the cat never meowed at him once. It stayed out back with me, and the sun got high, followed me inside there, and still never looked out the door for all of Herbert's callin'. Maybe I should have left Herbert be, but I carried him a plate and like the fool I am, begged him to please eat. He took it and dumped it on the floor. He never said a word, just give me that sulk look I hate. I left him alone then, but he come in not ten minutes later yellin' he had more luck than just a goddamn cat. He picked it up where it was sleepin', choked it 'til it went limp and throwed it down. Then he started to carryin' things out to his mattress; Bobby's old bowling trophy and the bat he got for being on the high school team, my mama's Bible and her weddin' dress, Herbert's scrapbook, and an old program we saved from the Gallup Rodeo. I followed him out and watched him spread that stuff in a circle around his mattress. I went back in. I was thinkin' to bury the cat and stay out of Herbert's way, but he come in right behind me. He had his pocketknife out and he picked the cat up and cut off the white foot. He went to the back door. He throwed the cat out and put the foot in his shirt pocket. He come after me. He said give him his quarter and shook the knife at me. I told him please not to cut me, just take it. I weren't about to battle that knife then. I knowed I could get my quarter back.

Sheriff, I'll tell him, I waited a hour. I thought: *Don't.* Then the wind come up just like I'd dreamed. I figured the storm was comin'. I thought: *I never seen him kill it, but it's dead; I seen that.* I needed the luck. The storm was on me; I made up my mind. I got out the shotgun. He was in the circle with his luck around him. He held up the quarter to stop me. He grinned like he weren't a bit scared. I told him I had to have my luck; it was my quarter, I traded him fair. He just held it steady, grinning all the time. He never asked me to come in his circle. I pulled the trigger, I reckon they'll say I killed my husband for twenty-five cents. Sheriff, I'll tell him, that weren't it at all. I thought it had to be. I almost went soft on him, but I seen the stain there on his shirt pocket. I knowed what he'd a done and I done it, but Sheriff, I'll have to say, look at the cat, sleepin' there on Herbert's stomach like it's done forgot how it lost that foot. ❧

...out of Herbert's way, but he come in right behind me. He had his pocketknife out and he picked the cat up and cut off the white foot.


P. MARTIN

Look out — what's that behind you?! Eek, it's ALIVE!! It's alive!

THE SECRET OF THE MUMMY'S BRAIN

BY WILLIAM R. EAKIN
Illustration by David Martin

... I know I am myself. If I err, I am.
For he that has no being cannot err ...
— St. Augustine

I *AM*. I KNOW THAT THERE ARE ARGUMENTS ABOUT THAT DOWN at the Blake County Courthouse, but small boys still say they see a mummy-man walking at the edge of Redgunk Cemetery at night, and old men whisper to little girls The Secret of the Mummy's Brain; every week stout women in flowered dresses report pies stolen from windowsills by wispy fingers when no one is there, the yellow dogs with their black smelly lips howl sometimes at midnight, and even some of the whiskey-hardened theologians on the bench in the square feel the life-affirming tingles at the base of their spines when they think of their own boyhood and running through the night-grayed kudzu with their hearts in their mouths and something stirring behind them in the gravestones. I *am*.

And I am not that husk of a thing on the dusty shelf in the Museum of Science and Egyptology at the back of Uncle Joe's Corner Liquor Store and Gas. No, like that yellow frog in the half-emptied cloudy jar of formaldehyde, like that leathery stuffed alligator with the broken teeth, like that mounted ancient Cuban Cigar with Castro's signature but no smokeable tobacco, my essence is not there, I am not on the shelf, I am not in that empty plastic mannequin from Macy's New York wrapped up in knee bandages and viewed by out-of-towners who have a quarter or a good-lookin' wife who can wink, tourists who certainly stopped only for a cold brew or to ask directions and to wonder how the hell they'd got to Redgunk, Mississippi,

whose minds are full of nightmares of fat Southern sheriff's boys stoppin'em someplace and puttin'em in some eternal dungeon for a trumped-up parkin' violation — and, indeed, while such things have happened in this area, the occurrences are rarer than people might think — tourists looking through their windows at the little strip of highway and wondering where the hell the interstate signs went and feeling the creeping, moist life of the kudzu winding over the trees and bushes and street signs, winding and waiting, just waiting, with a palpable plant life to grab them, too, those tourists, and turn them into the moon-silhouette of formless green creatures like the trees, or simply into stop-motion figurines like everyone in Redgunk, Mississippi, into inertia itself. I am not that noncreature of plastic and bandage that some salesman from Atlanta pawned off on ol' Uncle Joe as being an authentic Egyptian mummy wrapped and sealed in the dreamy pits deep in the alabaster pyramidal tombs of antiquity. I am not, in my essence, that thing with the cobwebs running down from my head and onto the shelf with the other museum items, their placards unreadable for the dust, that mere thing surrounded by old rusty cans and faded toothpaste tubes, mixed screws and nuts and nails, oil spots, emptied whiskey bottles, the eight-track cartridges Uncle Joe forgets to play, the old rumpled photographs of Uncle Joe on his fishing trip to Bermuda with Mabel Delashmit, the old dreams crumpled like the gum wrappers here and there and emptied like the chewin' tobacco tins. I am not that. But I am.

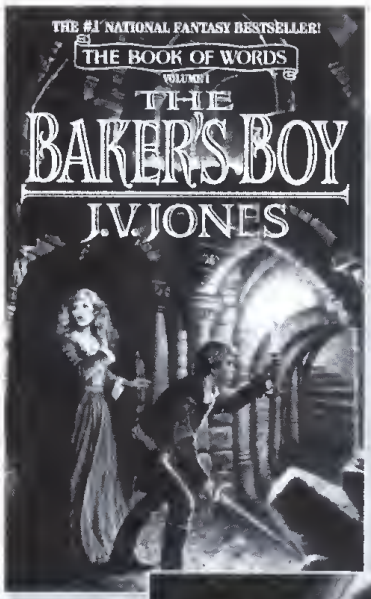
OH, MARY ANN KLUGEL! NOWHERE on God's green Earth is there a prettier and smarter woman, and here you are making change for the passersby because Uncle Joe can't get up out of his wheelchair anymore and really doesn't even want to come down the road to the store from his dark drinking in his fine double-wide. Mary Ann Klugel. Well, maybe you do have a bad complexion and a heavy mustache and some slightly in-grown features, but nothing plastic surgery wouldn't help. But you do have flesh, something I gotta give you credit for, and your mama had good genes. No one's quite sure about your dad, except me, of course — some salesman from Atlanta, they say, the one they talked about and then forgot like he was a midsummer breeze stirring the particles of humidity and touching the kudzu leaves and then departing. I knew him, and I knew the truth. He spoke like silver snakes were coming out of his mouth. And he wove dreams: Listen. Listen, and you can hear in the dust the stirrings of his breath: *I, madam, would take you to be my lawful wedded wife if there indeed were any way for a man to change his bitter circumstances, to make lotuses blossom up out of the desert, to kiss a stone into a wild, vibrant spring — that, madam, I take to be my life, a rock waiting and yearning itself into the dreams of orchids and fiery passion flowers and dancing fountains. And so you see, girl, I can only take your hand and yearn for what could be the better part, yearn for the oasis and for a single drink from a forbidden well, and down in the well, the sirens are singing and I hear your voice there, and I smell your sweet perfumed sweat like an ancient incense, like the blue flowers still preserved in color and fragrance in the gold coffins of ancient kings, waiting for just that drop of your lips, the sweet nectar, the elixir, to fall and bring me back to life.*

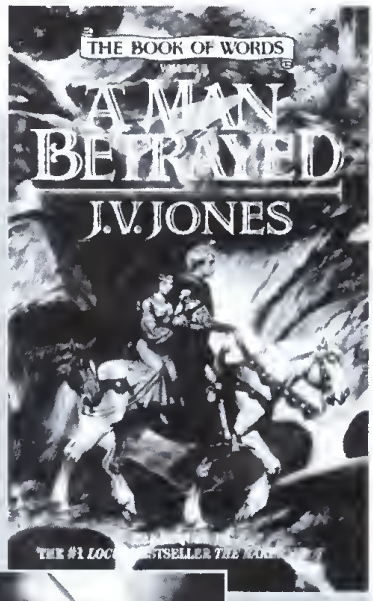
Mary Ann Klugel, I don't know exactly what all he said or meant, but it got him into her pants. I was there; I saw it. Your dad and mine — not really mine, just my — creator, you could say. Mary Ann Klugel. I was there, and if I could reach out and tell you, I would whisper in your ear with a silent yearning that in fact, even if he was seedy and dishonest and more likely to steal a last match from a frozen match girl than to give her one, still there was something important about the way he spoke words and wove dreams, and touched your mama's breasts with nothing but the crispness of his consonants and the long, slow drawls of his vowels, touched 'em and made 'em stand up like they'd never been alive before, and I don't care what they say about him or her, with his words he could speak life into creation, give life with just formed breath, and so you and I, you see, we have that much in common, we have that much uniting us, though you are a vibrant, beautiful creature of flesh and blood and I am — plastic and knee bandages and the stale air caught in the emptiness of a false and featureless head.

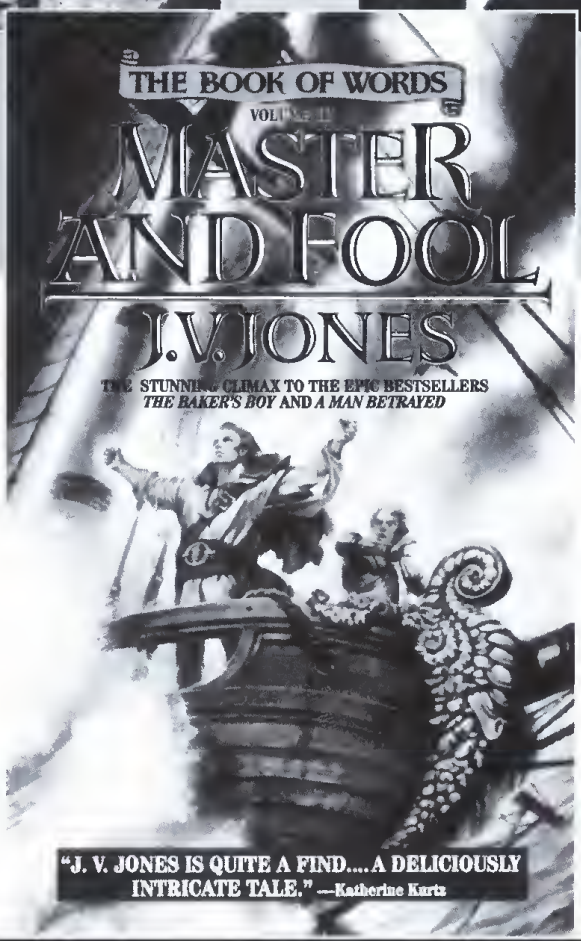
I SEE YOU NOW, MOVIN' ABOUT LIKE SOME ANIMAL, caged, not impatient, but patiently waiting out the hours for the nothingness you know will happen, and you with all those Bible verses etched in your heart; I hear you whispering them when you ring the cash register and pass the brown paper sack — suspiciously bottle-shaped— to wizened old B.M. Garvey, or to Jimmy Delashmit, whom you know has had liver problems already and been down to the clinic in Felpham, or to Frog Mulligan, who has violence problems when he's in the whiskey, or to cranky Orin Vire, who killed his wife last year by driving her down into her own inertia, or to Myrtle Kimbriel, in whom you see yourself, because she, like you, is born and bred Redgunker and she ain't never seen the blue wide Pacific of land that lies just beyond the wet leaves bending at the turn of the old military road, and the high point of her life, Myrtle Kimbriel's, was reading the poem "Trees" to the Christian Ladies' Auxiliary down at the Mount Zion Christian Church of Redgunk and her proudest accomplishment besides that was the invention of a clam-spaghetti sauce that put Bobby Yocher in the hospital for three days with a bleeding ulcer and she, too, has looked longingly at the television wondering what those people are doing there, how they could look so like they do in places that look so much like the places they are — and she, too, was on Uncle Joe's soft side though she'd once slept with the old man for a bottle, and you would never do that, not even when or if you turned as old as she is and as addicted to the juice, though you catch yourself — and I see you do it — catch yourself and breathe hard for a second knowing that though you are not sleeping with him, you do take his minimum wage, you take it like some prostitute chained into the same circular motion that put ol' Myrtle Kimbriel exactly where she is. And it's then, Mary Ann Klugel, that I want to reach out to you with my wispy fingers and stroke your hair—and, good lord, girl, you do have nice hair — soft, mousy brown hair, a little disheveled, but your mama was never really much on teaching you hygiene, and admittedly, it would be a little springier if you'd wash it a touch more often, but I imagine it — I imagine it! — with all its gentle clean vibrancy, with the softness of a girl's sweet, tender soul.

I know you, Mary Ann Klugel, I can read you in your movements back and forth behind the counter and among the bottles. I can read your steady uncertainty, your awkwardness. I watch your thighs move beneath the flowery print of your secondhand dress and I know by the way you move them and sometimes pull the slip straight with brusque, quick movements of your hand, that you think your thighs are as big as those of the elderly women who complain about my supposedly stealing their pies — as if it weren't a good thing for them and as if it wasn't just a yellow dog with black smelly lips that did it anyway. But Mary Ann Klugel, you should not feel this way about yourself. I know you feel them — those thighs— getting bigger and that you won't sit on the barstool because you think — even when the store is empty for hours — that you don't want anybody, including yourself, to see your haunches drooping to either side. Oh, my sweet, I see in your mind how they expand, expand like bursting star systems, and in your mind's eye, they do so on the Redgunkish physics principle that what stays still — and I mean stays still behind a counter, or on the couch at home, or sitting in the vast empty sea on that little emerald island called Redgunk — on the principle that what stays still must grow and expand. Stay still, stay here, and you will get fat. Fat. Fat. Work here and go home and be in Redgunk you will be a lardass, you say. But, Mary Ann Klugel! Somehow, if you could stay

J. V. JONES' EPIC BOOK OF WORDS TRILOGY







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ASPECT
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still, really, Mary Ann Klugel, really still like a mummy in a glass case, instead of twisting like a hurt snake inside, instead of letting the bugs crawl up and down your soul, somehow, if you could stay truly still, Mary Ann Klugel, then indeed you would expand, and you would burst out of this place, the plank walls flipping down onto the oily cement, the cable television and electric lines on the poles outside twisting and turning and breaking and falling away so that they no longer held you bound to the Earth, and the sky would burst open and you would see the stars, you would see the stars with the eyes of those priests from the alabastered pyramids, the sky wide open and bursting with beauty and brilliance and you would see me, too. You would see me, too, Mary Ann Klugel. I know you, Mary Ann Klugel.

SO, NOW YOU DUST. YOU FIGURE, HELL, CLEANliness is next to godliness, and if you can't get out of the most godforsaken little store in the most godforsaken little town in Mississippi, with its 240 inert citizens and its dozen or so yellow dogs with black smelly lips and its broken-down old mobile homes littering the sweeping pastures up and down the main highway, why, then, hell, the place outta be clean. So I see you sell a bottle or five to Georgie Boy Pflugel, who says he dips his dogs in it, and then I see you secretively turn the OPEN sign over to read CLOSED — and the trembling pudgy fingers you use to do this tell me you know full well that Uncle Joe would spit tobacco at you if he knew you did it, and that you're thinking, *this is the worst sin I ever did, closin' up like this in the middle of the day*, but I know you're doing it because you don't want to be caught bending down with your fat thighs looking upward through that dress — and you are the only girl you know who graduated from the Consolidated Schools of Blake County in 1985 in a girdle. And you open your pocketbook, which is plain and brown, and, of course, you are ashamed of it, too, because you always wanted one with large daisies and bright colors, and because you are ashamed of just about everything anyway — and you dig out a handful of old nylons and worn cotton panties and a small bottle of Windex. *Windex*? Ain't your mama ever told you how to clean properly? No, I know that's not it. She was a meticulous woman, constantly grooming herself and sweeping the wooden floor of the little plank Shotgun house for any and every man who happened to come along — I know you're using the Windex bottle simply because they're always on sale down at Burly Bob's Discount Warehouse in Felpham, four for a dollar because of bent nozzles and discoloration.

Well, so you start to clean, and it is really stunning that so much has lain hidden for so long under so much dust. The little alcove with the sign reading UNCLE JOE'S MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND EGYPTOLOGY is your last priority, since the visitors are rarer there than at the liquor and gas counter and you're taking as much time as possible before turning over that OPEN sign again, but you finally get back to us and when you dust the fluorescent bulb just above my head, it flickers on — and I'd damned well forgotten it was there at all — and in the light I see your face up close to mine, and you are looking up at that light, wiping on the metal fixtures, and it seems to me that you could be the Virgin herself, with that electric glow on you, and it seems to me that men who discovered electricity forgot how it is a force of angels, of Earth gods, of the magic of a noumenal universe, but in that moment I re-feel its power on your sweet, humble face. Young girl — you're 30, of course — but you seem to me to have a freshness that hasn't been killed, and maybe it's been preserved, ironically, by all the other things — the awkwardness, anxiety, fear — that have made you cover yourself with protection as I am covered by knee bandages. And if it is possible for a hollow plastic mannequin from Macy's New York wrapped up in knee bandages to fall in love with a woman of flesh and blood — and Lord, I know it is possible, that indeed, the Tin Man didn't need a physical heart in his empty tin barrel-of-a-chest because he already had a *real* one and I do not need one to hurt because it already hurts — if such a thing is possible, then I, at the moment of seeing you this way, I know I am in love with you. Why? Hell. I don't know. Maybe it's because sitting in that damned Museum of Science and Egyptology with Uncle Joe for some 30 years I've been greatly deprived of beauty, or have had to carve it out in the strands of dust or seek it in the disappeared color in the skin of the baby shark, now ghostly white, in that jar on the shelf across from me or find it in the reptile-like bumpy-flesh on the back of Uncle Joe's neck — and that's pretty damn hard to do. Maybe it's because I — with my essence still floating like a perfumed incense in the hyperspace those fictional, pyramidal priests created with their chants and dreams of eternity — I, so needing beauty, find it now, after 30 or 30,000 years, in you.

And now you touch me. You touch me for the first time. Not me: the bandages. You touch my wounded body, my soma, my tomb, you touch it with that cloth smelling of Windex and you wipe gently across my face. And my nonexistent eyes smart for a moment with the powerful bite of ammonia and modifiers and solvents and then I look out at you and see that you look in at me. *Darshan*. Do you understand what *Darshan* is? The Hindus gaze upon their sculpture and the god begins to gaze back — the god is not permanently in the idol, the clay or the stone or the metal; but the god looks back, for this rite, this moment, this touch of divinity. You look in and you see my eyes.

LAST NIGHT THERE WERE 19 MUMMY-SIGHTings in Redgunk and Felpham alone; that doesn't take into consideration the loss of a pie in Blue Falls and the mysteriously slamming door in the basement of Burly Bob's Bar and Grill down on the county line and Violet Odom's cat found out of her mind, chasing her own tail. I am new, renewed, living; I am. And though you do not look at me, have not looked since that one brief encounter yesterday, and though you cannot even give a hint that you know I exist, you cannot, because of the laws of physics and morality and so forth, acknowledge my presence, I know you felt it, and I know deep down, you feel it. Deep down you know you are not surrounded by dead, newly dusted things. Deep down you know there is life in the room where you are, life and love, just as deep down you know electricity pulses with divinity and plastic and knee bandages can be animate. Do you know it? Can you feel my eyes on you, gazing not with pity but with something that stretches from one world to another, some strange need and yearning and love? Do you feel me? Do you know that I am? Will you turn again now and look into my eyes? Darshan?

No, it's late. I understand, you will need to close, turn over the OPEN sign, but only on your way out the jangling door. Dark outside. I have listened to the cicadas all evening; I went, indeed, out beyond the body, to stand in the empty highway and hear them singing from the trees. And I watched the fireflies, and some boys hurried away, because they imagined my silhouette in the twilight to be much more than it was. I watched the fireflies come down from their trees with their tiny specklings of divine light, and watched them blend into stars. And I saw you at every moment, the specklings in your eyes, and I saw your innocence, Mary Ann Klugel, and a melancholia but a freedom, too, that the whole of a Redgunk universe cannot collapse. I wish you saw it. You would laugh — I know there is laughter in there — and you would never again shift awkwardly in your thighs, and you would never again wear a girdle or work for minimum wage. You would — be a god, a goddess, a divine moment.

It hurts me to see you touch the sign; I wish for a reprieve, another moment where you stop and look back into the Museum of Science and Egyptology and see my eyes sparkling here, for you. I wish for

Continued on page 84

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LOVE EQUALS FOUR, PLUS SIX

VIOLET DREAMED SHE was in a bar called the Abacus, wearing a grey flight suit with an "X" on the shoulder and talking to Pi about the radius versus the circumference. She was sipping a blue liqueur called Equilibrium and trying to impose some sense onto her surroundings. Outside the bar, blurred figures moved down pathways in a park. There was a sign by the park gates which read "Basic Ops Plaza." Violet remembered she was at the center of a city, that four streets enclosed the park like a picture frame. They were Add Route, Subtract Avenue, Multiply Way, and Divide Street.

Pi was talking about himself, attempting



We are more than the sum of all our parts — when cells divide, the opportunities for love to multiply.

BY A.M. DELLAMONICA
Illustration by John Berkey

A man at the next table overheard him and snickered. "Somebody stand you up, honey? Hope he's not a variable!" His companion, a perfectly symmetrical woman with a pattern of zeros on her low-cut dress, laughed.

to entertain her by rattling off short sequences of numbers. "I particularly like this bit," he said, "It's repetitive enough to be beguiling." For some reason this struck her as funny, and they laughed together.

Then the phone rang and Violet sat up, instantly alert, so different from Cray with his morning hour of grogginess and bad temper. She was surprised to find herself still in jeans and t-shirt, and then she saw the open box on her bureau. She was pregnant. When the little wand in the kit turned red she had felt a rush of terror so strong that her head started pounding, and to avoid dealing with it she had hurtled into bed for a nap.

The phone rang again, and Violet ran to get it. Maybe it was Cray, calling from the plane. She could describe the weird dream while she decided if she would wait until he was home to tell him.

"Good evening." It was a stranger's voice, clipped British tones; "I'm calling from England. Is this Mrs. McLean?"

Violet felt her toes start to tingle painfully as though her feet were falling asleep. She put a hand to her throat and answered sharply. "I'm Dr. McLean's wife, if that's what you're asking. My name is Dr. Violet Dayton."

"I'm sorry to call you with this news," the voice continued. Lying of course, he didn't care at all. She closed her eyes and wished the hateful voice away, wished she was still dreaming. He droned on in public television tones, saying a lorry had hit Cray's taxicab, could she please come? No, there was no chance of moving him home, it would be much better if she'd just fly out.

He was due back in six hours, twelve days after the end of her last period, due back in plenty of time for them to try for a child. They'd made love before he left ten days ago, the way they always did before a separation, clinging to each other for warmth and fun. It had been a relief not to worry about taking her temperature or consulting the calendar, not to think about the odds. It was soothing to know that he was making love to her because he was absorbed with the ten days they would spend apart, sleeping alone with the ocean between them.

Now some trucker had put him into a coma, and she was pregnant, and Cray might die.

She put down the telephone and stared at it, so numb that she thought she might fall over if she tried to walk away. She stretched out one hand carefully, like a child balancing on a fence, and hit the auto-dial for her mother's house.

Daisy bustled around the room while Violet sat in front of her suitcase, a cup of cooling tea in one hand, a handful of underwear in the other. She was trying to pack, but her concentration kept failing. Every now and then her head would droop and she would have to jerk herself back into the waking world, spilling more tea into her lap each time. "He'll be fine, just fine," her mother kept saying as she selected clothes, but Violet saw that she buried a black wool dress under Violet's socks. She bit down on her tongue to keep back screams.

The taste of blood filled her mouth as Daisy harangued the airlines, getting Violet an early flight to London.

She called the Math department and arranged for someone to take Cray's classes. She called Sociology and got the number for Violet's grad student, called her up and told her the whole awful story before Violet could stop her. The two of them made the arrangements for Violet's classes. Finally Daisy slammed down the phone.

"Are you not keeping your passport in Mother's jewelry box?" she asked, poking through Violet's jewelry for the envelope of family paperwork that grandma used to hide there.

"It's in Cray's desk," Violet said, and Daisy's lips tightened.

"What about shots?" she said as she went to fetch the papers.

"I think it's all right. We were just there."

She blinked and for a moment she saw Cray in front of her — an image laid over the bedroom like a double-exposure. He was lying in a hospital bed next to a silver tray bearing a kipper. One side of his head was bandaged. She sobbed, spraying a few drops of blood onto her sleeve, and she curled up like a wilting houseplant, clutching her husband's pillow.

Suddenly she was in the Abacus again, her Equilibrium spilling from her drooping wrist, radiating out in a perfect, spreading circle on the table in front of her. Pi frowned and righted her hand. "You balanced?" he said, and she jerked away, and found herself back in her bedroom. Daisy was staring down at her and Violet could feel tears running down her face. She was hugging the teacup to her chest and her dress and bra were soaked through.

"You'll give yourself narcolepsy," Daisy said.

"It doesn't work that way," Violet said, sniffling. She always slept when there was trouble, as long as she could, as much as she could. You didn't have to worry when you were asleep. Daisy had no sympathy for this tactic. She liked worrying.

"You going to make it to London OK? Maybe I'd better buy two tickets."

"I'll make it."

Daisy's glance flickered to the box on the dresser. Violet had heard her rummaging in the trash beside the toilet for the little wand.

She thinks he's going to die, thought Violet. She wants to come so she can identify the body. She thinks I'll miscarry if I see him. Her teeth started to chatter. "Just take me to the airport, Daisy," she said. "I'm sleepy because I'm pregnant." She had remembered being extra dopey the first time so she bought the kit, feeling silly as she did it. Just another twenty bucks wasted on false hope. Cray had left two days after her period.

THE ACCIDENT HAPPENED WHILE I WAS waiting in the drugstore for my change, she thought, recalling the anxiety she'd felt when the girl had to go get bills to break a fifty, leaving Violet clogging a long line at the till. She waited there, feeling fatigued, wishing she could hide the box that sat conspicuously in front of the cash register. She could feel the customers staring through her back, trying to see into her womb.

Daisy squealed, wrapped her arms around Violet, and cried, "He'll be OK, Vi, I know it. You just go there and take care of yourself and bring him home." She stood stock still in her mother's embrace. When Daisy pulled away and said, "Get your coat on and I'll drive you to the airport," she obeyed silently, like a six-year-old getting ready for school.

"I said, are you balanced?"

Violet looked at Pi , surprised. She had made herself comfortable on the plane and dozed off right away, and now she was back in the bar.

"Sure," she said slowly. "I got a bit distracted."

"You calculus types," he said, sounding fond and exasperated, and she smiled as he started to chatter. She tried to drift within the dream, waiting for a wave to take her somewhere new, for the undertow of sleep to drag her to some dark place where she could escape her fears and worry.

But the bar stood firm, not very dreamy at all, and after finishing a tall glass of mint-scented liquid, Pi stood up to go.

"I gotta factor," he said, "but it was great seeing you. Hope he shows soon." He gave her a hug and jaunted out.

A man at the next table overheard him and snickered. "Somebody stand you up, honey? Hope he's not a variable!" His companion, a perfectly symmetrical woman with a pattern of zeros on her low-cut dress, laughed.

Violet took the glasses to the bar, where a tall woman whose nametag said RootThree was wiping down the counter. "Another one of those?"

"Actually, I was wondering if my friend had paid." She had an idea that Pi had bought the drinks, but she wasn't about to leave without making sure. The last thing she needed was for the dream to turn into a chase scene.

"Tab's clear, honey," RootThree said, and then her eyes softened. "Trouble?"

"I'm trying to find my husband," Violet said, and heard it come out, "I'm trying to find my Y.'

"You say you wanted a scotch?" said a woman's voice.

Violet opened her eyes to find a flight attendant peering at her. The tinned-air smell of the airplane made her stomach twist and tighten, and she wondered if it was too soon for morning sickness.

"No," she said.

She made herself look out the window and saw the ocean, saw a hint of the coast vanishing behind the wing. Cray hated flying, but she liked the feeling of being cut off from the world, remote and unreachable.

She realized that the flight attendant was waiting for her order, and she thought of the Equilibrium, its odd color, deep blue like antifreeze. She pointed at the pitcher of water and the flight attendant gave her a glass.

Math dreams, Violet thought, wondering if the Abacus was something Cray's subconscious might conjure up. That might mean he was having the one where she locked her fourth grade science teacher in the closet, she thought, and tried to smile.

He's in a coma. He probably can't dream, she told herself, but then she remembered Cray's pet project, his quest for the formula for telepathy.

It wasn't anything the university would fund, of course, and Cray never mentioned it to his colleagues, keeping his reputation solid with work on fluid dynamics, work that led to a position on the National Science Council. But he was convinced he could boil emotions and thoughts and communication into formulas. He thought he could transform the world with them.

He had told her, and she had not laughed, because he was her husband and she loved him. Also, he'd made her promise not to. She had smiled and tried to understand what he was saying, but privately she wondered if this was the first phase of math genius crackup. They said in math that after thirty-five your period of genius was over. Cray had told her so.

"Numbers touch every aspect of life," he'd said, arguing his theory. "You use them in your work."

"They're crude representations of data that can't be analyzed otherwise."

"But if you had accurate numerical descriptions of your sociological data, you 'd get better results," he'd said, rapping his desk as though he'd scored a point. "We could be overlooking a whole discipline of science. Maybe we can work magic when we find it. The physics of mental communication," he said in a dreamy voice. "The engineering of mind reading. Magic."

Magic, she thought, and wondered uncharitably if this was somehow tied to the baby they couldn't conceive.

"You quadratics," she mumbled now. "I'm looking for my Y." A woman in the seat ahead of her turned and shot Violet a look that said "shut up" through the crack between the seats. No telepathy required to read that message — it was as clear as one plus one is two.

She leaned forward and met the woman's gaze. "My husband's in a hospital in London. He might die before the plane lands. I'm ten days pregnant with our child. Be grateful I'm only mumbling to myself and not making a scene." She let her voice rise threateningly at the end, and the woman reared away as if slapped. She settled in her seat and pretended nothing had happened.

"He might die before the plane lands," Violet said, and her tongue started to throb where she had bitten it, and her nose began to run and she felt the sobs coming.

Quadratics, she told herself fiercely, rubbing at her eyes. She tried to remember her high school algebra and took a deep breath. She had a good head for math, but she mostly used the statistical disciplines in her work. Quadratics. A quadratic equation. $3x + 2y = 6$. She took another breath, already getting sleepy. Was that right? Maybe it was a quadratic equation? Were they the same?

"I don't know," RootThree was saying. "If your values are co-dependent, he oughta be here. You could solve for him, I guess. Got any formulas?"

Formulas, Violet thought. She remembered how she had given Daisy a tea towel one year for mother's day, embroidered with the old clunker about the recipe for a happy home — one cup patience, a ton of love, sprinkle with kindness and serve to everyone you meet, something like that. Was that what the bartender meant?

"Formulas for my co-dependent value? We're having a baby," she said, and what came out was "I'm working on our product."

"No good," said RootThree, obviously surprised that she would suggest it. "We won't know the product until you're done."

"Pardon?" The dream was transforming what she said to the language of this strange land. She spoke again before RootThree could repeat himself. "I don't suppose you know anything about a car accident," she said, listening. "Heard of any vector collisions?" she heard herself say.

RootThree brightened up. "Yeah, actually. A big one on Hypotenuse Overpass. Gosh, you think he intersected?"

"How can I find it?"

RootThree dipped a swizzlestick in the Equilibrium and began to draw on the bar.

Turbulence woke her the second time.

It was nighttime. Fingers of clouds clung to the window of the plane, wraiths trying to get in. The flight attendant had dropped a pillow and blanket onto her tray in exchange for the untouched glass of water. Violet shoved them aside, grabbed up her purse and her credit card, and got into the line for the on-flight telephone.

Cray wanted to work on telepathy because he felt it might be the easiest discovery to crack. It was the tip of the iceberg, he would say, the part that peeks above the water. He thought it was possible to quantify the occasional flashes people experienced, the premonitions that loved ones were injured, the bursts of in-marriage mind reading, the eerie links between identical twins. He read New Age journals with lurid covers and ridiculous headlines, took notes on incidents, listed common factors. He installed a massive computer downstairs and joined Internet chatgroups on psychic phenomena. He wired the computer to compare his data with existing formulas, looking for connections. At times he would show a page or two of numbers to Violet, statistics that were more in her line than his, and ask her to check his figures. She teased him about "the Nobel-winner he was baking in the basement."

"There is no Nobel for math," he'd said seriously. "Alfred Nobel's woman ran off with a mathematician. We get the Field's Medal."

She checked his stats, and when her own reading turned up anecdotes related to his work, she copied it and brought it home.

The hospital put her through to Cray's doctor right away, and Violet was convinced that he had died. They would have put her on hold if he was still alive. Her grip on the phone tightened until her knuckles cracked as she told him her name and asked about Cray.

"He's still in a coma," the doctor said, and her legs buckled. She landed on her knees on the floor of the plane, the phone cord stretched to its limit. "He went into cardiac arrest once, but we pulled him through."

"Is his — " The flight attendant was approaching. Daisy bullied her way onto the plane before takeoff and told her all about Cray and the baby. For once Violet was glad, because the attendant stepped between Violet and the people in line behind her, shielding her from their view. Violet shut them out and tried to think of a useful question, something that might provide a clue to her dreams and how she might help Cray. "Do you have an EEG on him?"

"No, we're not too concerned about the head injury. I suppose the police got you worried about brain damage, but I can assure you that what your husband said before he lost consciousness — "

"He was awake?"

"Briefly. I assumed you were told."

"No."

"Then why ask about an EEG?"

Violet got back to her feet, leaning on the wall of the plane. "Please, just tell me what he said."

The doctor sighed. "All right, but I want you to remember we're talking about severe trauma, and it's quite a typical response."

"What is?"

"When the ambulance driver asked him his name, he said he didn't know."

The vector collision was right where RootThree said it would be.

After the bartender drew the directions on the counter, Violet had the foresight to lay a napkin over the liquid gridwork, soaking the blue lines into the cloth. It had been a smart precaution. The streets were laid out in a rigid orderly fashion, but there was so much to see in this strange city, and she kept getting turned around.

When she looked straight at a building, triangles and formulas seemed to glow in the air around it. Shafts of sunlight struck the pavement and the angles of incidence and refraction peeped their values as she walked past. A black-garbed sidewalk preacher with equal signs for hands exhorted her to go forth and multiply, and she stopped for a moment, thinking he might know something about the baby before realizing he wasn't talking about her at all.

At one point she raised her hand to block out the sun, and she saw the amount and direction of the force she was exerting against gravity to keep it aloft.

Vectors and speed variables pulsed through the streets, and some of them resembled taxicabs, but she stuck to her feet and kept her eyes on the map, taking care not to stretch the linen. Finally she found Hypotenuse Overpass.

THERE WAS A CROWD, HELD BACK FROM the scene by a yellow rhombus which floated in midair at waist level. Black-coated Constants patrolled the perimeter, occasionally snapping at the rubberneckers to "go back to where they came from." Violet wormed her way through the bodies, her hands crossed protectively over her stomach as if a wayward elbow might cause her to miscarry, though she knew she wasn't that delicate.

She pushed against the crowd and someone moved, and she nearly tripped as she fell through the gap in the crowd. She was brought up short against the yellow line, which stretched and then snapped her back. She would have fallen on her back if an anonymous variable hadn't caught her.

"Cray!" she screamed.

He was sitting on the edge of a flatbed truck, his feet dangling, surveying the scene. The truck was in the centre of a chaos of bodies and bits of formulas. Random numbers lying in the street were being sorted with care into two stacks and piled in separate corners of the cart. Sometimes they resembled people, like Pi and RootThree. Sometimes they were fractured bits of numbers and figures.

Heads, including Cray's, turned in response to her shout. His eyes passed over her curiously and then moved over the rest of the crowd.

Violet tried to duck under the golden line, but it ducked with her, and suddenly a black-suited constant was there, grabbing her arm. "Easy," he said.

"Let me through," she said. "That's my Y."

"You got a proof of that?" the constant sneered.

"I just came rushing out here to get him," she snapped. "I didn't think I'd need my marriage certificate to collect him."

"He can't tell us what value he's got, sweetie," the Constant said, taking her by the arm and leading her back toward the crowd. "All he is now is some unknown that might belong to one of those collision vectors."

"He's not unknown to me," she said.

"Yeah, yeah," the constant said. "For all I know this is your pathetic bid to pick up a whole number."

"He's my husband!"

"Solve for him then," the Constant said. "What's his value?"

"His name's Cray. Short for Craig," she said. The Constant began to look bored, opened his mouth to cut her off. "I've got dozens of formulas," she said breathlessly.

"Cut the buildup and get to them."

Formulas, Violet thought. Formulas for us.

She took a breath and hoped the plane wasn't about to land. If she woke up now he'd get rid of her for sure, and they were bundling Cray's legs onto the truck with the last bits and pieces of the vector formulas, and the driver was starting up the engine. "He hates flying," she said, hoping her words would translate into something this boorish Constant would accept. "He sits near the aisle and pretends to read when we take off. I pretend I'm frightened so he'll get distracted and comfort me." It came out as a string of gibberish, letters, and numbers, and Cray had turned his head as if he could hear her.

"He gets along with my mother, and it drives me nuts," she said quickly. "And he likes to read mystery novels, even though he never figures them out, and then he wants to tell me how they ended."

Cray hopped off the truck and took an uncertain step toward her, and Violet began to feel herself waking up, began to see the seats in front of her as the pilot announced their descent at Heathrow.

"He turns everything into a number," she said, knowing she was speaking aloud on the plane, that the woman in front of her was muttering angrily and waving for the flight attendant. She hung onto her fading vision of the Constant and kept speaking. "He insisted on putting this dumb formula on the bottom of our wedding invitation. One times four plus three equals seven, it said. He wouldn't tell me what it meant until our wedding day." A third image seemed to lay itself over the plane and the strange, mathematical roadway, white corners, a window with yellow curtains, the sound of feet nearby. "He hates my music. When we came home after the miscarriage he wouldn't let me play my favorite album, and the fact that he wouldn't baby me made it feel like it would be OK."

"Dr. Dayton?" The flight attendant said. Violet looked at her through the view of the hospital room, through the weird accident scene and the Constant's broad chest.

"She's right," Cray said. "That's me." The torn flight suit sealed itself up and a "Y" appeared on his chest. He reached past the Constant and took her hand. "The one was the number of letters in 'I'," he said. "Four letters in love, three in you."

"Seven?" asked the Constant.

"Forever," they said. The Constant shrugged and shoved him outside the collision perimeter. He wrapped his arms around Violet and buried his face in her hair.

"I'm working on our product," she said, and Cray looked briefly puzzled. He repeated what she said, and as his mouth formed the words he gasped and lifted her. When their lips met, streams of numbers and symbols swirled around them in the air.

The bump of the airplane tires hitting the runway woke her completely, and the Overpass and the truck and the crowd vanished altogether. Violet smiled and closed her eyes to keep Cray from seeing the plane's interior. The smell of kipper prickled her nose like a wire cleaning brush, and she saw Cray's doctor, a young fellow with blond hair and a crooked front tooth and a wedding ring.

"You had a close call there," the doctor said.

"Yeah, but I made a great discovery," Cray said.

"How're you feeling?"

"Terrific. My wife's pregnant." The doctor frowned.

"She's not here yet," he said.

"No, she's bringing our Field's medal," Cray said, and they laughed together as she stepped off the plane. ❧

Vectors and speed variables pulsed through the streets, and some of them resembled taxicabs, but she stuck to her feet and kept her eyes on the map, taking care not to stretch the linen. Finally she found Hypotenuse Overpass.

THE STOVER CUT

BY CALVIN HORNE

Illustration by Gary Lippincott

It's a strange old world out there, and you never know who — or what — you'll run into. Best keep an eye out …

I SPENT 25 YEARS ON THE Roekill Canal, and hadn't a damned thing to show for it except four mules, a quarter interest in a rebuilt packet boat named the Bee, and a wife who couldn't sing, but did anyway.

Opal sang near all the day long. She knew more songs than I'd ever heard of, but she most loved the one about the raging canal, the one where the mules drown and the waves run mountain-high. It's a joke, you see. The canal weren't more than four foot deep and forty across, so the biggest waves you'd ever see was splashes from a drunken steersman who'd stumbled overboard.

But Opal loved that song. Every time we'd come into a big city, she'd belt it out loud and strong. And damn near every time, she'd burst out laughing halfway through, and never finish it.

I don't know why she laughed like that. I never thought the song was all that funny, specially after hearing it a hundred times. But Opal always did. She'd just let loose with this great big, raw-boned laugh, and the locksmen always knew it was me coming, even if they couldn't barely make out my boat.

I like to think about those days sometimes. It seems like my life's divided in two. There's the days like those, when Opal and me, we took the Bee up and down the length of the Roekill a hundred times, and over into the Southern Canal as well. And then there's the second half of my life. Seems like there's a fence between the two halves, but I didn't really notice it until the night we took the Stover Cut.

Things didn't change all sudden-like. They started to go bad in the years before the war, when prices started climbing, and everyone was edgy and mean, and no one ever had all the food they wanted.

Finally, after one hardscrabble winter, Opal stopped singing. She wouldn't laugh, she wouldn't hardly ever sit with me on the bow of the Bee and watch the banks



roll by, even when the berm was covered with spring flowers. In fact, she wouldn't do much of anything but cook up meals and walk the mules. Our hoggee boy caught the cholera, and she had to tend to the mules when he lay sick abed.

She turned right sour, and I couldn't help but think I had something to do with it.

You see, I was having money problems then, and though I didn't tell her how bad things was, she sort of picked up on it and got to be just as glum as me. When the hoggee boy finally died, she went into a funk that lasted clear through to July.

We got us a new hoggee boy in Hemphill. You can always find them begging around the hiring halls. But this boy was fresh out of the city and didn't have experience walking mules, so Opal spent most of the time out on the towpath teaching him how to set the traces and how to goad the beasts when they didn't feel like hauling 25 tons of barge up the waterway. I just stayed on the boat, steering.

The Bee was a sleek little packet boat. It was about 50 foot long, with a passenger cabin in the middle that I'd gutted to make room for hauling. It couldn't carry much cargo, but over the years it took on enough to keep us fed and keep up the payments to my partner.

I was neither richer nor poorer than the rest of the boatmen, but that was fine with me and that was fine with Opal for most of the 15 years we spent together before the war.

Sure, there were some tight times, but never so bad as to make me think of giving up the Bee. If you'd ever asked me to choose between Opal and the Bee, well, I would have picked Opal, but in the years before the war, I would have given it a moment's thought.

Jobs started getting tighter. Everyone was talking that war might break out, and the freight companies started stockpiling goods in their warehouses, which meant fewer goods to haul. In the past, I'd always been able to take on the small hauls, but now the big boats were vying for them, too. They could take on six or seven cargos to my one, and because they took on so many they could shave the prices down.

USUALLY, A WINTER'S LAY-over was all it took to get the freight hopping again. There'd be plenty of cargo sitting in the warehouses at one end of the canal or the other, just waiting for the ice to break. But this year was different. When spring came, the only things you could find in the warehouses were squatters, and most of these were haulers who'd sold their boats for food.

That spring, I started losing bids. There were days when Opal and I would just sit in Colby waiting for traffic. That's no way to live, specially when your boat's not all your own.

My partner was a banker. He had a great big house outside of Malvern, overlooking the Rocklyn River, and he took half my profits every month. I never knew much about that style of life. I was only in his house once, and that was when we were introduced. I can just barely remember the long, quiet halls with the thick carpet and the cedarwood paneling. It didn't make much of an impression on me then because I had other things on my mind, but when I came back to think of it later, I realized how much money he'd put into it.

At that time, I was working as a mule tender on a big boat called the Blue Nightfall. I was about 20, and aching for a boat of my own. I'd been a hoggee boy at 16, and I'd spent my growing up along the canal. There was nothing I loved more than the lazy motion of a boat floating down the canal.

The captain of the Blue Nightfall was a decent sort. He could see what my dream was, so he introduced me to this banker with the great big house outside of Malvern. The banker said I looked like an upstanding young man, and offered to foot three-quarters of the bill for a boat, so long as I could come up with the rest. I agreed, and within a week settled on the Bee.

I'd had my eye on her for about a year. She'd been laid up in Eagle Bend with a blistered seam, the owner gone bankrupt when the packet trade died out. But I knew by her lines that she was a solid boat, and I knew some carpenters who could make her right again.

All that winter, I worked with the carpenters, until we'd secured every inch of board. I moved a stove and a couple of bunks on board, along with my uncle's old mantelpiece clock and a shelf I'd built for it.

Now, I should mention that I was right proud of that old clock. My uncle had brought it back from overseas the time he was a mule tender in the Little Emperor's army. It was old and slow, and it never could strike a full 12 strokes at midnight, but with a little bit of care it was reliable enough, and it was the only thing left for me to remember my family by.

I set out that spring, proud as a rooster, the master of my own boat. I called her the Bee because I liked to think of her flying along, down the canal, through the fields of flowers on the banks.

Now, perhaps my partner was a kindly man to his neighbors. Perhaps he supported charity houses with the money he made. But I soon found out he was the devil's own brother when it came to payments. He insisted on his due, spot on every month at his office in Malvern. It didn't matter where I was on the canal. If I were late a few days because of snarls at the locks, Lord help me; he'd flay me alive and threaten to sell his share of the boat for scrap.

Well, sir, I never was much afraid of that happening, because I always had the money, and both of us knew I could be counted on to bring it in when I arrived in Malvern.

Or at least that was always the case until the year I'm telling you of.

This particular year, I'd been late with the payments more than once, and not because I was stuck downstream. I simply didn't have the money. I was forced to take loans from kindlier folk just to bring my partner's payments in.

Not that he was having a grand time of it, either. His face looked drawn and sunken, and while he was usually in a temper, now it seemed more sullen and resigned. I walked out by his house one afternoon, and it didn't look as nappy as I'd remembered it. Brambles were growing at the edges of the lawn, and some of the paint under the portico was peeling.

I was afraid what my partner might do, so when the offer came along to take a cargo through the Stover Cut, I had to take the job.

Nobody much liked to talk about the Stover Cut. It was a straight, 14-mile stretch through the swamps between Eagle Bend and the little town of Stover, joining the Roekill Canal to the Southern Canal.

You'd think the canawlers would use it all the time, since it could save almost a full day's travel: You didn't have to float from Eagle Bend down to Woodville, where the Roekill and the Southern met. But no one had traveled the Stover Cut for a dozen years or so.

The state sent a locksman down once a year to check the locks and peek in at the canal. The water level never dropped, so you could still ride it. But nobody did.

Even when it was first built, the Stover Cut weren't too popular. The diggers, a bunch of impressed workers from the islands, claimed they saw things in the marshes at night—pale white things that hung in the reeds and watched them. They claimed they could hear talking, sometimes faint music in the distance. But of course, there was nothing there.

The whole area between Eagle Bend and Stover was marsh. It had a few dry hills and some spots of willow or alder, but it was generally a flat field of reeds higher than the tallest man's head. In the

daytime, when you stood atop a barge, all you could see were reeds, stretching out into the distance.

A lot of people put these stories down to campfire talk. You can scare yourself good just by sitting around a fire and building up what you think you might have seen.

But then the canawlers started seeing things, too. At dusk they could see lights, or maybe heads peeping up over the reeds. More than one said he saw mansions far out in the swamp, where no one in his right mind would live. Nobody ever saw the same thing in the same place twice, though, and nobody ever dared slog out to investigate.

I ran the Stover Cut once, a few months after it was built, and it gave me the creeping chills. I was 21 at the time, and I was courting Opal. She was the daughter of a farmer out Glendale way. I wanted some extra money to buy her some nice lace, so I agreed to join in a train of barges carrying hides from Eagle Bend to Flat Rock.

I wasn't much scared, but I wasn't much pleased with the thought, either, so I put on a brave face and made sure the Bee was smack in the middle of the train.

We left Eagle Bend at dawn, but once we hit the swamps we ran into a thick morning fog that covered up most everything. I could see the stern of the barge in front of me and the nose of the one behind me, but that was it. A couple of hours in, I put down the hoss bridge, and walked out to the towpath to give my hoggee boy a break.

The whole morning was damp and quiet, and I could barely even hear the mules' hooves. The towpath, you see, had been overgrown with a light moss that muffled sound like that good, thick carpet in my partner's house.

The air looked like gray wool, and I felt kind of drowsy as I walked along, so I never noticed the hiker until I near tripped on him.

I don't know where he'd come from; he was just ambling down the towpath in the opposite direction, easy as you please. He was dressed in one of those tight frock coats, with a silken cravat in the old style. He swung a walking stick easily, and you'd swear he was just another townsman out for a Sunday stroll. That's what I thought, at least, until he passed right by me and tipped his stovepipe hat and said, "Good morning," real friendly-like.

I looked at his face and jumped. His eyes had no pupils, no irises—nothing but a pair of white bulbs rolling in his sockets like boiled eggs.

Well, sir, my heart started twitching, and I froze in place. But the man with no eyes just kept on walking down the towpath, and before I thought to say anything, he was swallowed up in the fog.

Now, I've seen blind men, but he was nothing like that. His eyes were more like a dead man's, rolled up inside his skull.

When I got over that first shock, I started thinking, what in perdition is a man doing out here for a Sunday stroll anyway? Nothing but swamp for miles around.

I'd lost the shadow of the boat in front of me, and the boat behind me was coming up so close that their hoggee boy had begun to shout at me to get up my mules. That snapped me out of my daze, and I started walking again.

I stayed down on the towpath for most of the rest of the trip. I didn't want to chance my hoggee boy seeing what I'd seen. It wasn't until the fog lifted, about a quarter-mile outside of Stover, that I climbed back on board the Bee, and turned the reins over to him.

I might have put the whole thing down to jumpiness, might have even forgotten about it, but for one thing we discovered when the barge train finally swung into the Southern Canal.

The Young Lion of the West, a bullhead barge out of Hemphill, had disappeared clean out of the train. No one had heard nor seen anything, but for me. It wasn't like the boat could have sunk or run aground. But it was vanished, quiet as the moon, along with its owner, Gilbert Laird.

The Young Lion of the West had been riding directly in front of my Bee.

After a few more such incidents—hoggee boys disappearing and the like—the state agents shut down the Stover Cut. They never filled it in, and they left the locks standing, but they discouraged the canawlers from taking that stretch. And with the reputation that had grown up around the Cut, there weren't no canawler alive willing to argue with them.

At least that was true until the hard times hit. About that time, some of the companies started looking at the Stover Cut as a way to squeeze a few more pennies out of a trip.

The Bee was laid up in Eagle Bend at the time. We'd done a short haul of apples up from Woodville, but had nothing else to take on, so I sat around the canawler's hall and visited the warehouses trying to drum up something.

There was a poster up on the wall one morning that drew a lot of attention at first. The canawlers would walk up and read it carefully, some of them pointing at the words one by one 'cause they couldn't read all that well. But every one of them, when he came to the end, shook his head and walked away. A couple of the old ones even shivered a bit.

I'd been in another line for a chance at a small consignment of oil barrels, but one of the big boats had got a man in ahead of me and the shipment went to him. So I went over myself to read the poster.

Seemed that the Lindschau company — I couldn't barely pronounce the name — wanted a load of gunpowder brought right quick from Eagle Bend to Flat Rock, which was south of Woodville. And when I say right quick, they wanted it two days from now. No excuses. Late deliveries wouldn't get paid.

His eyes had no pupils, no irises—nothing but a pair of white bulbs rolling in his sockets like boiled eggs.

At first it didn't strike me. I thought that everyone had shied away because the cargo was gunpowder. That was a sure risk. Haverly's Bulldog had been blown to splinters less than a year ago transporting gunpowder. But that wasn't the real reason they shied away. It was the fact that the only way to get from Eagle Bend to Flat Rock in that amount of time was to cross the Stover Cut.

So I shook my head, just like everybody else, and shuffled away. I spent another two hours in the hall, but it was clear there were no other jobs. Just hungry canawlers, some of whom had taken to sleeping in the alley outside because the dockmasters had seized their boats for fees.

The sun hadn't hit noon when I finally got up the nerve and walked down to the Lindschau company warehouse and told the foreign man behind the counter that I'd take his gunpowder to Flat Rock for him.

"You're crazy in the head," said Opal when I told her about the job. "I never knowed you to be crazy in the head before, but you are now."

"I'm crazy in the stomach," I said. "This is good money here, enough to last us a while. And there's nothing else for work."

She just kept going tsk, tsk, tsk and scowling at me worse than ever. We'd pulled up to the warehouse, and a gang of workers was rolling the barrels into the hold, careful and slow. She didn't watch them, though. She just looked down at my feet.

"Are things that bad?" she asked, but it seemed that she didn't really want an answer. "You're scared to death of that Cut. I remember your face when you told me that story about the Young Lion of the West."

I wouldn't look straight at her either. "I'm more scared of starving," I said.

"Then I'm with you," she said. She put her hand on my shoulder and rubbed it lightly. We both looked each other in the eye then, and I could see that she was just as scared as me.

Loading the boat took the better part of the afternoon, and I spent it taking care of business. I banked the advance payment, I loaded up on supplies, and I convinced the foreigners at Lindschau to let our hoggee boy work in the warehouse 'til we came back, since neither Opal nor I wanted to bring him on this trip.

At about four in the afternoon we lit off, riding low with a full load for the first time in months. The Bee steers different with a full load, and I liked the feel of it. She moves slower, like a sleepy cow swinging her head, but she's got a lazy sort of grace when she's got a full belly.

The foreign warehouse owners had put a locksman on our boat, since there was no one living at the Stover Cut lock. They said someone would be waiting at Stover to let us out. The locksman had the same waxed moustache and wore the same suspenders as most of the other locksmen I knew, but he was a little more dapper for having lived in the city instead of in a cabin at lockside.

"Think you're going to make it?" he asked, and he gave a little laugh to show he was joking. But he looked at me as if I were heading for the noose.

The Stover Cut lock was a small thing with rusty wheels and mossy oaken gates, but with a tin of oil and a bit of sweat we were able to get the machinery working again. I darn near wrenched my back out twisting one of the wheels open, but I saw Opal leaning on the gunwale looking at me with a frown, so I was careful.

The mules lugged the Bee into the lock, and then the locktender and I swung the heavy balance beams that shut the gates. The Stover Cut sat a little lower than the Roekill, so the water rushed out of the lock with a roar and the Bee sank a couple of feet.

I climbed back onto the Bee, and the locksman opened the lower gate, along with one of the paddle valves, so we had a bit of a swell to ride out into the Stover Cut.

It was a warm, cloudy evening. In the old days, we'd sit on the deck playing backgammon, but we didn't have a hoggee boy, so Opal was down on the towpath walking the mules. I didn't have much to do but sit in the bow and try to guess whether the sun would set below the reeds before the clouds overtook it.

I fixed Opal and myself some potatoes for supper and brought a tin cup of water out to her. She thanked me kindly, but her hand was shaking a little bit when she took it.

I planned to take the overnight walk, but I didn't feel tired, so I lay down on my back on the deck and talked to Opal. I told her about the last time I saw my family, which was long, long ago, and the way my sister died of a winter flu, and my first days working on the towpaths.

She chuckled in all the right places and clucked her tongue when she should have, but I could tell that she didn't bend all of her mind to it. The hard times had put as much of a strain on her as they had on me, and though she hadn't much complained about it, I knew that she was feeling pretty low.

At about seven o'clock we changed the mules, and a couple of hours later I took over walking them.

By then it was dark and damp and cold. The clouds had sunk down, just like they had the other time I walked the Stover Cut, and they looked just like dead gray skin. I put up torches on the bow and the stern of the Bee, but they just flickered.

Opal said she was tired and went inside. I was kind of disappointed that she didn't stay out and talk to me, but I could understand.

His arm looked as long as a tow rope. The skin glowed like it was on fire, but the fire was wet and white.

So I had the canal all to myself. I hummed a little bit, but the notes just sounded flat, like the clouds sucked all the music out of them.

I thought about Opal and me and how happy we'd once been. Every time I heard her singing, I used to know that I loved her. But these days I was snapping at her, which I never used to do. And sometimes I even felt like I'd be better on my own.

And the more I walked, the more I wondered if we were really made for each other, like I used to believe. If we couldn't stay happy through a couple of hard years, then maybe we weren't the perfect match.

Now, I'm not saying I had any illusions. We used to fight once in a while, but we'd always kiss and make up, and we'd go for months without a breath of harshness between us. I'd seen the other canawlers' wives and most of them were rough and unpleasant, and most of the time the canawlers would beat them. So I always used to think Opal and I, we had something special. But maybe it wasn't so special after all.

It was tough to think about all that, so I tried to distract myself by looking at the canal.

Usually, when I walked along, I watched my feet and I watched the mules, but this time, I caught a glimpse of something on the opposite side of the canal. It was dark, but I swear I saw a side cut in the berm—a place to pull a broken barge into.

That was foolish, of course. There'd never been a side cut in this canal—I'd seen the maps. It must have been a broken spot in the berm. But the more I looked, the more it seemed to be a cut, smooth and regular as if someone had made it just a year or two ago.

I stared and I stared but it was hard to see with just the torch light, so I stepped up to the edge of the towpath and craned my neck just a little bit. And that was my mistake.

The edge of the towpath hadn't been maintained, and the clay was crumbling, so when I stood too close, the ground gave way and I toppled into the water.

I shouted and I thrashed around in blackness for a couple of minutes, until I fetched myself a great whack in the head, bumping against the keel of the Bee. This made me see lights that weren't

there, and spun me all around, so that when I finally climbed out of the water I had no idea which direction was which.

I stood there for a moment, drenched to the skin, and lost in the darkness. I finally hollered for Opal. There was no answer, so I hollered again. And again. I couldn't hear anything, not the thump of the mule hooves or the little splash of the Bee's wake, but that wasn't surprising, since the mules usually stopped dead when there was no one to guide them.

I took a step forward, stumbled, and then shook my head. I was still a little dizzy, and I couldn't see much of anything in the darkness. The reeds were a pale white wall to my right, but I couldn't even tell if I was on the northern side or the southern side of the canal.

Then, I heard a clock striking. It was my uncle's old mantelpiece clock, and it was somewhere in the darkness ahead of me. I started walking toward it, the sound getting louder and louder.

Finally, by the time it reached the 12th stroke, I could see the stern of the Bee in front of me. The torch had gone out, but by now my eyes had adjusted, and there was just enough light from the bow torch for me to find the hoss bridge and climb on board.

The minute I got on the deck, though, I knew something was wrong.

The Bee was a packet boat with a 10-by-12 cabin in the stern, and a small stable in the bow. This was a bullhead, half again as big as my ship. And then I remembered, the clock had struck 12 strokes. My uncle's clock couldn't.

I was so dumbfounded, I didn't know what to do. I just stood there and looked around, until finally the door to the cabin opened.

At first I didn't recognize him. I hadn't seen him for more than 20 years, and it wasn't until I noticed the brass plate above the door that it fell into place. He was Gilbert Laird, and this was his boat, the Young Lion of the West.

"Hello, Gus," he said. "I'm glad you've come back." His voice wasn't quite normal—it had a faint steel buzz to it. And his eyes were just like that other Sunday stroller's: rolled back up so that only the whites showed.

But otherwise, he looked just like he had 20 years ago, and he acted just as friendly as ever. He gave me a great big grin.

"You've come here to live, then? You and Opal?"

"What?"

"That's why you've come here, isn't it? The world outside got too much for you? We heard stories about how bad things had gotten—the war coming, work falling through."

I nodded. "Sure is bad." I don't know how I could just stand there and talk to this ghost, but it seemed so natural.

He seemed to know what I was thinking, and he smiled again. "I know it's kind of a shock, Gus. It took me a while to get used to it. People living out here. Houses and all. But it's peaceful here. And everyone's friendly. And no one starves."

"What people?"

"There's a whole city in here, Gus. I thought you'd figured that out. I thought that's why you'd come." His face sank a little. "It's not?"

"I'm just delivering a load, Gilbert. Had to use the Cut. No other way to get it to Flat Rock on time."

Laird sighed. "Why don't you join us anyways, Gus? Live here with us. We're happy. It's not quite like what you're used to. We're a little different here in the marshes. But it's a good life; it's quiet and it's happy."

I was baffled. He sounded so sincere. I never thought a ghost would sound like that.

In the distance I could hear a clock striking.

"Here," he said, and stepped toward me. "Take my hand. Come with me. It's strange, Gus, but it's good." He stretched out his hand and his arm looked as long as a tow rope. The skin glowed like it was on fire, but the fire was wet and white.

"Take my hand, Gus."

Despite myself, I was reaching out to him, when somebody clambered up the hoss bridge and jumped onto the deck of the Young Lion of the West.

It was Opal and she was carrying a heavy, hooked fire poker.

"Get away from him!" she screamed, and she brought the poker down as hard as she could on Gilbert's arm. He howled in pain, as if she'd shattered the bone. He stepped back away from her, his eyes all squinted up, and he cringed like a whipped dog.

"I was only trying to help him," he said, and drew back further.

She paid him no attention. She grabbed me by the upper arm and damn near threw me down the hoss bridge.

I stumbled along the towpath, following her. I was still confused, as if I'd woken up out of a deep sleep. I glanced back once, quickly, and I could see Gilbert standing at the bow of his bullhead. He was nursing his arm and looking awfully sad.

By the time we'd gotten back to the Bee, which was in front of the Young Lion of the West, I'd woken up fully, and I was in a hell-fired hurry to get out of there. I took the mule lead, and Opal leaned out over the bow. We both watched for other boats and other white-eyed people, but we never saw another.

WE GOT OUT OF THE Stover Cut alive, without any more problems. The lockman said he darn near dropped his pipe when he heard us coming. He could hear us, because we were singing again, the both of us. We were singing the song about the raging canal, and this time we almost finished it. But Opal started giggling at the line about the drowning mules, and she was outright laughing by the time we got to the line about the cook loaning her dress for a signal flag. And by then, I was laughing too, just as hard as she was, so that we were fit to bust by the time we reached the lock.

We got the money for the gunpowder run, plus a bonus, and that was enough to keep us going for a while. Then the war started, as everyone thought it would, and most of the young canawlers signed up to fight. That meant jobs aplenty for those of us who stayed, and those jobs would keep coming, because I knew that a lot of those young canawlers would never come back.

No one tried to run the Stover Cut again. I told a few people my story, and they spread it around, until there was no chance that anyone would ever set foot on that path. The government dynamited the locks and sealed off the Cut and planted trees around so that, in later years, you couldn't even notice that there'd been a lock there.

We saved some money during the war, and a few years after it ended, I sold my share of the Bee and bought a little cottage down in Woodville, where Opal's cousin had a store.

We lived the rest of our lives in that little cottage, which was near enough to the canal that I could walk there every morning and watch the boats go by.

And every once in a while, I thought about the Stover Cut and what Gilbert had said to me. Was it really a better life in there? Or was he sent by the Devil to lead us down to Hell?

I never knew the answers. I never knew if I'd missed something better. But sometimes, when I walked back from the canal to our little cottage, I could see his sad white eyes staring at us as we floated away. ❧

HOLDING PATTERN

THE FIRST ELECTRICAL STORM ARRIVED IN LATE APRIL, at a little after 9:00 p.m. I watched it gather in the west, watched lightning ripple through the clouds, listened to the distant thunder. Forty minutes later, it rolled over the house and drove me inside. It came with high winds and heavy rains. I left the sliding door open. The TV was on, low in the background. A political talk show.

I checked all the windows, and went down to the refrigerator, made a turkey sandwich, and opened a beer. I had just taken my first sip when the power went out. I hunted up a flashlight, and took my meal back upstairs. A tractor-trailer rumbled past. Visitor from another world. Rain splattered against the windows and the wind shook the house and muffled the distant whine of the truck engine.

In the dark, floorboards creaked and air currents flowed. On this kind of night, I could almost smell diesel oil and hard rubber, left over from the days when the Palmerton air terminal had stood on these grounds. The house was solitary, the only building for miles. A long rectangle of flat grassland, the old landing strip, extended from its rear, bordered by the highway on the south and thick-rising forest on the north. It was a relatively new house, a post-modern structure of glass and cedar,

BY JACK MCDEVITT

Illustration by Lawrence Ronald

Sometimes you just need a second chance — to get it right *this time.*

CX5

I've spent my entire life in a effect, surrounded by professionals, with the ultimately rational. All that came undone

remote, picturesque, idyllic. Not the sort of place that should have seemed lost in time.

Its builder had owned a chain of feed and supply stores originally headquartered in Palmerton. But he had become too successful and moved to Atlanta. At the time, I had no reason to doubt the story.

Nancy would have liked it. She would have loved the eucalyptus trees lining the driveway and the upstairs office with its adjoining deck and the hardwood floors and the sunken tub and the sense of isolation.

Had I been on time ... ?

I had agreed to pick her up outside the Greenwillow Mall at 8 p.m. But I forgot and she got into a cab instead, and the taxi had been rear-ended by a drunk in a pickup.

When my employer, Cabry Associates, finally went high-tech two months later, it released me from having to go physically to the office everyday. So I moved out here. It was not only a matter of fulfilling an old ambition to embrace a simpler life style, but of getting away from familiar places. With Nancy gone, they all hurt.

The sound of the tractor-trailer persisted. And changed pitch. It seemed to be coming back.

Odd. I got up and looked out the window. The truck's lights were disappearing in the distance.

I opened the sliding door wider and walked out onto the deck. Rainwater rattled in spouts and drainpipes.

It sounded like an aircraft.

I stood for several minutes searching the sky. The ground on the western side of the old landing strip, covered with pines, rose to a height of about two hundred feet. The clouds clung to the top of the slope, and lightning forked down into the trees. I wondered if someone were in trouble.

After awhile, the sound began to recede.

I listened for about ten minutes while the storm grew progressively more intense. After a time it approached again, arced off to the north, and swung back west. It was flying in a circle. The plane sounded low, at an altitude of no more than three or four thousand feet.

I went inside, picked up the phone, and dialed 911. A woman answered, "Sheriff's office."

"This is Josh Remick," I said. "I'm calling from the old Haldane house, on Bridge Creek Road. There's a plane here going in circles. I think it might be in trouble."

She was so slow to answer that I had to ask whether she was still on the line. "It's OK, Mr. Remick," she said. "We'll look into it."

"Thanks. I hate to bother you on a night like this. But I don't know who else to call."

"I understand. You relax. We'll take care of it."

There was an odd tone in her voice. I couldn't quite make out what it was.

When I went back out onto the deck, the rain had slackened slightly, and the sound was gone. I stood watching the electricity drain out of the sky.

IN DAYLIGHT, THE INCIDENT ACQUIRED A MORE PROSAIC QUALITY, and I was embarrassed that I had become so carried away as to call for help. I dismissed the matter and threw myself into designing a campaign for a television station downstate that wanted to launch its all-news format with appropriate fanfare. I settled in and worked undisturbed for a couple of hours. At about 11 a.m. a police cruiser pulled into the driveway.

My visitor was a middle-aged, well-pressed county cop. "Mr. Remick?" he asked, removing his sunglasses. He was big, with a muscular frame that was beginning to sag.

"Yes," I said.

"I'm Sergeant Petrovski. You made a 911 call last night."

I nodded, not sure what was coming, but feeling vaguely defensive.

"Mr. Remick," he said, "we get those reports all the time. Apparently there's something in the configuration of the landscape in this area that creates the sound you heard. Bunch of rocks on the north slope out back that howl like the devil when the wind blows through them." He smiled. "You also get an echo. Toss in a storm—" He shrugged. "There have been people out from St. John's and Pelton Labs to listen to it. So it's nothing unusual, and I suggest you just ignore it if you hear it again."

"It sounded *real*," I said.

"That's what *I've* always thought. But it's an illusion." He thanked me for my time, and left.

In the Palmerton area, during the early spring, it's almost possible to set a watch by the thunderstorms. A waitress down at Amy's Brick Oven explained that they roll in every night between nine and ten. "It goes on for four or five weeks," she said.

I took the rest of the day off and lost myself in a new Kissinger book. It was a cool, quiet afternoon, broken only by periodic highway noise. Occasionally, contemplating one passage or another, I looked out over the long, narrow field and watched the wind stir the grass.

The house felt empty.

I baked a chicken, turned on the stereo, and spent the evening playing chess against the computer. It's not an activity that I enjoy all that much, because there isn't much pleasure beating something that doesn't give a damn. But I played anyhow. (Nancy hated to lose.) The house was still full of strange noises, stirrings downstairs, creaking boards overhead in the attic.

The notion of a pile of rock that imitated an airplane engine wouldn't go away. It was hard to imagine how such an effect could have been produced. For one thing, the sound had clearly been in the *sky*. For another, I knew what an engine sounded like. As lightning began to flicker on the horizon, and the evening storm to brew up, the explanation that had seemed not quite plausible by daylight lost all semblance of credibility.

I signed off the computer, refilled my brandy, shut down the stereo, and walked out onto the deck. There *had* been a plane in the storm last night. Obviously it hadn't gone down or there would have been news stories. But it would be interesting to see whether Petrovski's anomaly could repeat itself.

The wind blew hard out of the west.

Nancy had always been attracted to storms. She would have reveled in this kind of weather. We had worked all our lives, talking about the things we would do when the time became available. None of it ever happened, except for an occasional rushed vacation, during which we had been distracted by ad campaigns or the emo-

world of precise cause and sure and certain knowledge that the universe is in twenty seconds in that hardware store.

tional deterioration of one of Nancy's patients. *Yes, it's a lovely storm. I wonder how Janet is making out tonight—*

Rain hissed into the tall grass. The trees writhed, and the wind shook the house. An occasional vehicle passed, its lights blurred.

I showered and changed into my pajamas. The wind must have been from a different direction because the deck was relatively dry. I padded out and listened to the storm.

Suddenly it was there.

Unmistakably, the sound of the engine came through the night.

I CONTACTED THE EARTH SCIENCES DEPARTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY of Georgia, and asked about singing rocks. They explained that there *was* a rock formation in the area, and that, given the right wind conditions, it was indeed capable of producing a sound "very much like someone moaning."

"Moaning?" I asked. I was speaking to a man who identified himself as a professor of geology, but who never got around to giving me a name.

"Yes," he said. "That's the way it's usually described."

"How about an airplane engine?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Might it sound like a plane?"

"I suppose that would depend on the imagination of the listener, Mr. Remick."

He faxed a map and an explanation. I went out to look.

The north slope was a tangle of thick vegetation, and there was a lot of loose rock lying around. The site indicated on the map was on the north side of the field, about a half-mile back in the woods, up a hundred feet. From my backyard, I could make out some tumbled boulders, but nothing more.

In for a dime. It took about half an hour to get to them. They were ordinary-looking rocks, rounded and smooth, half-buried in the ridge. They leaned together, not unlike a group of drinkers after a celebration. A narrow air passage, half-filled with dirt and pebbles, twisted among them. As I approached, a chipmunk darted out of one of its several openings.

I hadn't thought to bring a flashlight with me, so I couldn't see much. The passage opened wide on the western side, where the wind would enter during a storm. Then it funneled down, branched off, twisted through rock and earth, and emerged through a series of holes on the other side. Tone holes, maybe. Unfortunately, the day was still and there was no way to test the theory.

I went into Palmerton that afternoon on a supply run. One of my stops was Benjy's hardware store, where I picked up some bits for my drill and introduced myself as the new owner of the Haldane place. The proprietor was a wide, officious little man wearing a smile button that said "Please Let me Serve You."

"Notice anything odd out there?" he asked. It was his opening remark.

"How do you mean?" I immediately felt defensive, as if the grass needed cutting.

"Well, we've all heard stories." He grimaced, shrugged. "Nothing really." He pushed his hands into his apron pockets. We were alone in the store. "Nothing," he repeated.

"What? What stories?"

He collected his money, produced change. "About Mac McLaughlin," he said. "This is the time of year his plane flies."

I've spent my entire life in a world of precise cause and effect, surrounded by professionals, with the sure and certain knowledge that the universe is ultimately rational. But all that came undone in twenty seconds in that hardware store. "I don't understand," I said. "Who's Mac McLaughlin?"

The proprietor frowned and shrugged. "Kid who crashed out there thirty years ago. There's a story you can hear the plane when the weather gets bad."

"Sounds like a decent tourist attraction." I smiled at him. "*You* ever hear it?"

"Me? No." He grinned and dropped my bits into a bag. "Nice to meet you, Josh."

Palmerton has a small library in the center of town. It's in an old brick building between the post office and the bank. I went in, wandered back to the reference section, and introduced myself to the reference librarian. She was in her mid-thirties, with dark eyes and black hair cut short. She looked at me over bifocals and smiled shyly. "Can I help you?" Her name tag said "Pamela."

"I'm looking for information on an air crash," I said. "An old one. Happened in the area thirty years ago."

"Mac McLaughlin." She canted her head and smiled politely. "Just a minute, please." She checked her computer, went into a file room, and came back with a spool of microfilm.

"Do *you* know anything about the story?" I asked her.

"About the ghost? Sure." Her professional persona slipped and she gave me a quick appraisal. "Everybody knows the story. Are you by any chance Mr. Remick?"

"Josh," I said.

"Pamela Keith. Glad to meet you." Perfunctory smile this time. "Welcome to the neighborhood."

"Thank you."

"Well." She hesitated, looking at the spool. "Let me see what else I can find." She collected two books and led the way into a reading room whose north wall accommodated three microfilm cubicles. She set the spool in the threader and laid the books on a side table. Their titles were *Famous Southern Specters* and *They Walk at Night*. "These are not to be taken seriously." She meant the books. "Start the spool with April twenty-second."

I looked at the titles and frowned.

"He crashed trying to land during bad weather. The story is that he keeps trying to make the landing. Whenever there's a storm."

"Did you ever hear anything strange out there? By the old air field?"

"No," she said. "I don't know whether I've ever been there during a storm."

"You're not curious?"

"About a ghost?" Her bifocals had slid down on the bridge of her nose. She drew them up in a defensive gesture. "You're not serious, Mr. Remick?"

I shook my head. Of course not.

"Let me know if you need anything else."

I watched her walk away and turned on the machine. I was looking at thirty-year-old copies of the *Atlanta Constitution*. The accident was reported on the April 22 front page:

Apparently, the sightings had few years. There were numerous witnesses that purported to be

PALMERTON AIR CRASH KILLS PILOT

Palmerton, GA (AP) — *A crash at the Palmerton airport during a severe electrical storm last night claimed the life of a Georgia man. Thomas F. McLaughlin, 28, of Palmerton, the pilot, died at the scene. There were believed to be no passengers.*

The wreckage was so badly burned that rescuers were unable to get close for several hours. Local authorities indicated that McLaughlin was returning from an air show.

The aircraft, a Piper Cub, was not equipped for instrument landings, and visibility at Palmerton was reported to be poor. There was no explanation why the landing was attempted. An investigation has begun.

Follow-up stories reported that McLaughlin had been warned about previous violations of FAA safety regulations, that the air controller at Palmerton had granted permission to make the attempt and was being disciplined, and that wind conditions at the crash site were "severe."

The two books told much the same story. Apparently, the sightings (sometimes lights accompanied the sound of the aircraft) had begun recently, during the last few years. There were numerous witnesses and depositions, and even a murky photo that purported to be the phantom aircraft.

"Pamela," I said, tentatively, "when did they close down the airport?"

"About twenty years ago. They had two commuter lines out there when I was in high school. But the town got bypassed during all the highway building in the late '70s. It dried up, the commuter lines left, and after that—" She shrugged.

"They tell me my house is built on the site of the terminal."

"That's right. Tim Haldane wanted to build out of town somewhere. The old terminal was the ideal place because it already had phone and water lines and whatnot." She tried another smile. "Mr. Remick, I hope people haven't been telling you wild stories. Sometimes they do that. They enjoy having fun at somebody else's expense."

"My name's Josh," I said. "And no, it's not what people are telling me. Truth is, I'm wondering if I've heard the plane."

I WAS DOWNSTAIRS FINISHING UP THE DISHES WHEN LIGHTNING began to flicker in the west. I turned on several lights and went up to my office. The old landing strip, the forest, the highway, and the cluster of rocks were all bathed in moonlight.

I took a glass of brandy out onto the deck and settled down to wait.

What in fact *did* I believe? What was possible? Did people go on after death to another kind of life, still retaining some sense of their identity? Still able in some way to influence this world?

Gradually, the darkness uncoiled and the advancing clouds drove the silver light out of the landscape.

"Nancy," I whispered, "are you here?"

Rain began to fall.

I sat in the flickering light of the storm, clinging to the brandy. I wish I could say I was not apprehensive. I had begun to regret buying the house. What were my options if the specter actually existed? What court would overturn a contract based on failure to warn the complaining party of a supernatural presence?

The TV burbled pleasantly, three people debating an economic issue.

The sound of the engine gradually emerged from the roar of the storm. At first only an uncertain whine, it came by degrees to full throttle. I tried to place it on the hillside, among the cluster of boulders. And gave up.

There was most certainly something in the sky.

I finished my drink, went back inside, and refilled the glass. The phone rang.

"Josh?" A woman's voice.

"Yes."

"This is Pamela. From the library."

I needed a moment to refocus. "Yes, Pamela?"

"I'm calling you from my car."

"Where are you?"

"A half-mile from your place. I hear it too."

FAA INSISTED THERE HAD BEEN NO PLANE IN THE AREA ON EITHER night. Channel 6 owned tapes of the conversation between Mac McLaughlin and his air traffic controller, Ollie Christian. I drove to Atlanta and made copies while Pam talked to people around town, trying to learn more about what had happened.

"It's so long ago," she said, "there aren't many people left who were actually here at the time. But everybody old enough to have been around thirty years ago claims to have known them well. They were apparently friends. They went hunting together, played poker together, were both bachelors at the time."

It was mid-afternoon, and we were sitting on the lower front porch, drinking iced tea. "It must have been hard on Christian."

She nodded. "Why don't we listen to the tape?"

The voices were young and clear.

MCLAUGHLIN: *CX5 to tower. Request landing instructions.*

CHRISTIAN: *Hello, Mac.* (Static)—*Going to hand you off to Atlanta. We have heavy winds and rain. Minimum visibility.*

MCLAUGHLIN: *That's negative, Tower. I am*—(Static)

CHRISTIAN: *CX5, Say again.*

MCLAUGHLIN: *Negative Atlanta. Come on, Ollie. I've been up here all night. I want to go home.*

CHRISTIAN: *Mac, conditions are bad.*

MCLAUGHLIN: *My responsibility, OK? Listen, Jeri's waiting for me.*

CHRISTIAN: *See her tomorrow.*

MCLAUGHLIN: *Ollie, you know there's no problem here. Come on, give me some light.*

CHRISTIAN: *No, Mac. Proceed to Atlanta.*

MCLAUGHLIN: *Tower, it's only a rainstorm. How many times have I landed here in the rain?*

CHRISTIAN: *I wish you wouldn't push this—*

MCLAUGHLIN: *That's better, Ollie. Give me a vector.*

(Silence.)

CHRISTIAN: *Two-six-zero. I say again, two-six-zero. Lights are on.*

MCLAUGHLIN: *Roger, Tower.*

CHRISTIAN: *We've got gusts to forty, Mac. Visibility a quarter mile.*

MCLAUGHLIN: *Roger.*

begun recently, during the last and depositions, and even a murky photo the phantom aircraft.

CHRISTIAN: *Looking good.*
MCLAUGHLIN: *I see you.*
(Prolonged static)
CHRISTIAN: *You're a little high, Mac. And drifting right.*
MCLAUGHLIN: *Roger.*
CHRISTIAN: *Mac, that's a waveoff.* (Pause) *Mac, go around.*
MCLAUGHLIN: *Son of a bitch, Ollie.* (Sounds of pilot struggling for control of aircraft.)
CHRISTIAN: *Mac, pull up!*
MCLAUGHLIN: *This is not gonna work. Ollie—*
(Voice cut off. Muffled sound of explosion.)

"Wind shear," I said.

"I guess." Pam's eyes were hooded. "I remember hearing these years ago. If the ground controller hadn't been a buddy, it might not have happened."

"What happened to him? To Ollie?"

"He was fired. There was talk of legal action for a while. I guess McLaughlin's family thought about suing him. But in the end they backed off. He left town shortly after. I never heard of him again until word came that he died."

"When was that?"

"About five years ago. He was in Tucson when it happened. Rumor was that he was on the street. Welfare."

I watched a blue jay using my lawn sprinkler for a shower. "So what do we conclude? That Mac McLaughlin's still circling up there on stormy nights trying to make his landing?"

"The only other explanation is the singing rocks. Or a hoax. Could someone be trying to play a practical joke on you?"

"At the risk of his neck? I don't think so."

She finished off the tea and got up. "Have to get to work," she said.

I was grateful she'd taken an interest and I said so.

"It's OK. You looked a little spooked yesterday. I thought it would turn out to be the rocks. I was planning on taping them for you. But that wasn't the noise the rocks make. No way." She took a deep breath. "If there really *is* a ghost up there, I want to be here when it lands."

MAYBE IT WAS TIME TO CALL IN A PRIEST. OR A PSYCHIC INVESTIGATOR. How the hell did you find a psychic investigator? Yellow pages? Call a local university and ask for the "occult department"?

"Maybe," said Pam, "we should try to help him land."

"How do we do that?"

"We borrow a transmitter. And throw a party."

So we organized the social event of the season. I invited an army of friends and colleagues from Atlanta, and Pam rounded up a substantial number of locals. We announced it as a house-warming, printed fliers that included a breezy account of the phantom (we didn't want to scare anybody), and distributed them to invitees. We tried to retain a whimsical mood throughout so no one would think we had gone over the edge.

Approximately eighty people showed up. We passed out drinks and hors d'oeuvres and waited for the first sign of lightning on the horizon.

The storm ran late, and Pamela was a nervous wreck by the time the first clouds appeared, shortly before midnight. Soon the wind picked up, and we felt rain in the air.

I asked everyone to gather in the living and dining rooms, which were connected. We distributed numbers to the drivers, and told them a ghost hunt was about to start. I unveiled a map of the old airstrip and the area immediately behind the house. "Your number," I told them, "corresponds with the position I want you to drive to." I explained what they would be asked to do. They laughed about it, and there were jokes about getting old Mac down. I'd expected the locals to show some reluctance, but they had known before they came what we intended to do. I gave them a frequency on the AM band which we would use to talk to them. Then I passed out a round of black coffee, and the guests repaired to their cars. We'd marked off routes and positions using posts, white banners, and numbered placards. One by one, directed by volunteers, thirty-eight cars moved up my driveway, turned off onto the lawn, went behind the house, passed through an opening we'd made in the picket fence, and forked either left or right out onto the grassland. We had them go by the numbers, so the cars proceeding to the far end went first. When we were finished, two lines of cars faced each other across the field. When they were in place, they doused their headlights.

We had enough people out there to help in the event of problems, but everything went smoothly. I took my position beside Pam's black Saturn and gave her a thumbs up. She grinned back, excited. We'd got the use of a battery-operated radio transmitter from one of her friends. I turned it on, and picked up my mike. "Thanks, everybody," I said. "We can expect a fairly healthy storm. Please don't try to move. If you need anything, blink your lights and one of our volunteers will get to you. Otherwise, you should keep your lights off until you get further word." I don't know what they expected. But the storm was moving in and the last car was barely in place before rain began to fall.

Sitting behind my wheel, I ran Pamela's comment through my mind: *If there really is a ghost up there, I want to be here when it lands.* If there is a ghost, then it is proof once and for all that we are more than clay. That we survive. And that somewhere Nancy lives.

I wanted it to be true.

The rain intensified. I could hear, over the rumble of the storm, the rhythmic swish-swish of thirty-eight pairs of windshield wipers. They seemed to be operating in unison. Periodically, the twin lines of cars flashed into electrical relief. I pulled on my raincoat and a broad-brimmed plastic hat and got out of the car. We'd jury-rigged a shelter near my position by putting up a tarp. Pam was already standing beneath it talking to one of the volunteers when I got there.

"Nothing yet," she said. "Josh, what will you do if he lands?"

"Probably run." My hair rose at the possibility. "I think we're in for a quiet evening. Unless some of these cars get stuck in the mud."

We didn't talk much. Mostly, we just stood and listened. Twice I went back to my car and told everyone that we wouldn't be out here much longer. We tried to be honest, but I'm sure most of our guests, at least the out-of-town ones, thought we rigged some sort of surprise. The locals on the other hand did not want to admit to believing in the supernatural, but I suspected that deep down where you

The wind began to blow, The first raindrops spattered against the wind my table lamp spilled

don't go without hip boots they were jittery. They would have been hoping there'd *be* no surprise.

"Josh." Pam turned her face up to the storm.

I heard it: the distant murmur of an approaching aircraft. We retreated to our cars. "Listen up, folks," I said. "If you lower your window, you can hear the plane. I'll remind you that FAA has insisted, whenever we've called, that there is no aircraft in the area."

Car doors opened and closed. People were getting out, unmindful of the rain, looking at the sky. Across the way, a couple of flashlights blinked on.

The plane, if indeed that's what it was, drew closer. It sounded very low. It was coming in from the southwest. Indeed, it always came from the southwest, and I wondered what McLaughlin's angle of approach had been on that fateful night. It passed overhead and began to turn. "Ladies and gentlemen," I said. "Please turn your headlights on."

Thirty-eight pairs of lights stabbed into the night, illuminating the long grassy field that used to be Palmerton Airport's only runway. "Very good," I said over the radio.

The sound of the engine tracked slowly through the sky. It turned back west, came around, and moved toward us again. It seemed to be lower now.

Pam was at the door of my car, standing in the downpour. I opened it up and she climbed in. "I'm not sitting over there alone," she said.

The engine was almost drowned by the roar of the storm. It came around one more time and started a final approach from the east. It sounded close to the treetops.

It was going to land.

Lights appeared in the sky across Bridge Creek Road, coming in, and I looked at that terrible field, high grass writhing in the rain, concealing whatever furrows and rocks there might be.

"Somebody's actually up there," whispered Pam. "That's a plane!"

Nobody could land in that morass. *Pam was right and we'd drawn down some poor lost pilot.* I was terrified.

Car doors banged again, and headlights began pulling out of line.

The plane came low over the roof of my house; and I saw wing lights and a shadowy fuselage and the image of a pilot bent over the glow of the instrument panel. I shouted into my microphone, as if he might be tuned in on our AM frequency, that he couldn't land here, that he had to pull up. "It's not a field!" I told him desperately.

Then the wind took the aircraft. It moved violently sidewise, barrel-rolling, wing over wing, spinning toward the cars lined up on the far side of the field. But it cleared them and tumbled toward the trees. Its lights went out and, in that moment, the engine cut off.

We waited for the sound of the crash. But it did not come.

THE AFTERMATH WAS A SOCIAL TRIUMPH, BUT A PUBLIC RELATIONS disaster. People with flashlights converged on the site. "How did you do it, Josh?" they asked, delighted at what they perceived to be a sharp piece of pyrotechnics.

There were a couple of fender benders during the return, but on the whole everyone's spirits held up. They had been treated to a capital illusion, and they were delighted. Except for a few locals who suspected what *I* suspected. They made their good nights and went home thoroughly rattled.

Pam shook my hand. "You sure as hell know how to throw a party, Josh," she said. "I suggest we bring somebody in and throw holy water at it."

When the last of our guests had left, we sat out on the lower deck, watching a quarter moon sailing through the sky, not talking very much.

"You seem out of place here," she said suddenly.

"How do you mean?"

Chessmen were set up on a game table, just visible in the half-light. "You play?"

"Yes," he said.

"Me too. A little." Her face was in shadow. "I almost feel that you're hiding from something."

We'd both drunk too much, so she told me how she'd got married a long time ago and moved to Alexandria, Virginia. How, when he'd left her, she'd been too embarrassed to come home to Palmerton, had stayed in the D.C. area for several years, playing the singles scene for all it was worth until she got tired of it and decided that it didn't matter to her what other people thought.

And I told her about Nancy. I unburdened myself of the whole story. "You have to stop blaming yourself," she said, when I finished. Her dark eyes locked with mine.

I was taken aback. "I don't blame myself," I said. "It wasn't my fault."

"Good." Her lips curved into a wide smile. "You're a good guy, Josh. So what will you do now?"

"About the ghost? I don't know. Maybe sell the house."

"Why not just turn up the TV? You can't hear the thing unless you listen for it."

"No. I'll still know it's out there. Who was Jeri?"

"Beg pardon?"

"He said, 'Jeri's waiting for me.' Who was Jeri?"

"Oh. A girlfriend. I don't think they were ever anything more than that. It didn't seem to be any big deal to her. She got married a year later and moved away." Pam's brow wrinkled as she tried to remember. "Pretty, as I recall. A redhead."

"A grandmother now, probably." I got up and stood in front of a screened window. "Mac," I said, "she's a grandmother. Give it up."

She frowned.

"Something wrong, Pam?"

"Just a chill," she said.

MONDAY NIGHT BROUGHT A PARTICULARLY INTENSE STORM. I WAS alone, wondering whether anything would have changed, whether the aircraft would come again. It did. The sound of the lone engine moved deliberately through the sky for perhaps twenty minutes before it melted into the general fury of the storm.

Afterward, I replayed the tape. McLaughlin's voice was young and full of confidence.

How many times have I landed here in the rain?

And Ollie Christian:

I wish you wouldn't push this—

and the stars winked out.

shield. Up on the second floor, the glow from

eerily out onto the deck.

The storm passed over and left the smell of wet grass and ozone in its wake. I let the tape play, over and over.

Come on, give me some light.

I'd tried that. What remained?

I spent the evening watching TV, drinking past my usual limit until my head spun. And the house noises were more active than usual.

"YOU'RE GOING TO TRY IT AGAIN?" PAM'S VOICE ON THE PHONE was incredulous.

"Yes," I said. "If you can get the transmitter."

"I think so. But what can you do that you haven't already tried?"

"Talk to it."

Next I called the operations people at the airport in Atlanta to talk about frequencies.

The weather stayed clear for two nights. We sat out in the car and filled the evenings with idle talk. She wondered whether I would stay in the area.

"Why do you ask?"

"You don't belong here, Josh. Rattling around in that place alone. You don't fit."

"I'm almost retirement age."

"Doesn't matter. You're out here punishing yourself. Aren't you?"

"No." It was in fact not so. Not really. "I like living here."

"I wonder what *she* would recommend?"

Pam backed off and left it at that. We switched to safe subjects, politics, religion, whatever.

And on the third night, we got the most intense electrical storm I'd seen since moving to Palmerton.

The wind began to blow, and the stars winked out. The first raindrops spattered against the windshield. Up on the second floor, the glow from my table lamp spilled eerily out onto the deck.

The plane emerged from the storm. I looked up into the falling rain. No lights moved through the sky.

I switched on the transmitter.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'm going to try to talk to Mac. Tell him it's over. Direct him to Atlanta. Hell, I don't know, Pam. Whatever will work."

Lightning hit a streetlight out on Bridge Creek Road, and the entire section of highway was plunged into darkness. We looked at one another, and I set the broadcast frequency at 121.6 megahertz. "Tower to *CX5*," I said, "come in."

Pam sighed. "If something answers," she said, "I'm out of here."

I cruised nearby frequencies. And picked up a carrier wave at one-twenty-five. "Tower to *CX5*."

Nothing.

It was very still in the car. I repeated the call. Rain poured down. The headlights were off, the windshield wipers moving at half-speed.

I was about to try another frequency when the radio came alive. A voice said: "Tower to *CX5*."

Pam's hand squeezed my wrist. It was cold. She shook me. Frantically. "Josh," she whispered. "I know that voice." It was right off the tape.

The world squeezed down to the rhythmic click of the wipers and the carrier wave and the bursts of static and Pam's fingers, cold, hanging onto me.

"Tower to *CX5*. Please acknowledge."

But it was not Mac's voice. I took a deep breath and squeezed the transmit button. "This is *CX5*, Tower. Request landing instructions."

"Hello, Mac. I'm going to hand you off to Atlanta. We have heavy winds and rain. Minimum visibility."

It was *Ollie's* voice.

I stared at the radio, wrapped in its nylon carrying case. "That's negative, Tower," I said. "I am coming home."

"*CX5*, say again."

"Negative." Pam took the flashlight and shined it on my script. "Come on, Ollie. I've been up here all night."

"Mac, conditions are bad."

The plane seemed to be just over the treetops. Like Saturday night. "My responsibility, OK?" I said. "Listen, Jeri's waiting for me."

"See her tomorrow."

"Ollie, you know there's no problem here. Come on, give me some light."

The aircraft leaped into view, backlit by a lightning flash. "No, Mac. Proceed to Atlanta."

"Tower, it's only a rainstorm. How many times have I landed here in the rain?"

The wipers clicked slowly back and forth. "Negative. The lights stay off. Proceed to Atlanta."

"Ollie—"

"Tower out."

"Tower, this is *CX5*. Come in. Come in, you son of a bitch."

"What are you doing?" demanded Pam.

"Tower? Ollie, where the hell are you?"

Where indeed? I waited a few minutes and switched off the transmitter. I could see the wing lights now. They moved in a long lazy circuit around the sky and arced off toward the northeast. Toward Atlanta.

"What just happened?" asked Pam.

"I think Ollie got it right this time."

We sat for several minutes, not moving much, talking just to create conversation. Then I drove slowly back around to the front of the house. We parked the car and ran through light raindrops onto the front porch.

I mixed a couple of drinks. "It's late," she said. "I should be going."

But I knew how she felt.

"To be honest, Josh, I'd just as soon not be alone tonight." She must have read my face. "This has been a scary night."

I hesitated. I was not comfortable with the prospect of an overnight guest. "Sure," I said reluctantly. "I have lots of room."

"Josh," she said, "I won't stay if you preferred I didn't."

"No. It's no trouble."

She slipped into an arm chair. "It's all right, Josh," she said. "How about some chess?"

"Sure. I'd like that." I brought in the table and the chessmen and set them up, giving her white.

She studied the board, and pushed the queen's pawn forward.

The house seemed still. Peaceful. I drifted into the game. She was good. ❧

The desert sands told ancient secrets—but give Coyote a chance to speak and you'll soon learn all.

COYOTE WOMAN

BY MARGARET BALL
Illustration by David Beck

THE WIND WAS PICKING UP OUTSIDE, but it was hot as ever: a steady push of stifling, heavy air that whirled and eddied around the open windows and sent a shower of juniper berries sprinkling into Chris's office. I'm going to have to close that window, Chris thought in the back of her mind, but the front of her mind was tangled in the Navajo sentences she was trying to translate, and she didn't dare break the single thread of understanding that was carrying her through the tale. *Nt'ee hwiidoolk'aazh jini. T'aa ndzidza, jini.* Signs of warning. Coyote's Son set off on a journey to find his true mother and father, but he went the wrong way. But there was a tickle in his throat. But he had a bad dream. But a stick rose up in his path and warned him.

The wind sighed again, heavily, and this time a few juniper berries rattled onto the desk. "Now cut that out, dammit!" Chris said to nobody in particular, and went over to close the window.



A big yellow-gray dog was sitting on the dusty ground just outside, panting in the heat, tongue lolling. "Now who do you belong to?" Chris wondered aloud.

She stood at the window for a moment, feeling the heat of the day concentrated in the metal frame, staring at the view of brown hills rising steeply across the parking lot. It was probably a good idea to stand up and shift her focus from time to time. Rest the eyes. But when she closed her eyes, she could still see the white page and the black letters dancing on it, like a maze that kept shifting its shape. *T'aa ndzidza, jini.*

"Your accent is terrible," the dog said.

"It's definitely time to take a break when dogs start talking to me," Chris told herself. But she didn't want to stop. Any day now the senior faculty committee would be meeting to decide which of their two one-year contract professors would be invited to stay on for a second year and maybe be considered for a tenure-track job. Obviously they'd have to pick her — who'd want that jerk Warren around permanently? But just in case, it wouldn't hurt if she could mention to a few people that she had just submitted another paper to the *Journal of Southwestern Anthropology*. At least it would remind them of the papers she had already published.

Besides, if she stopped working on the article, she'd have to go over to the hospital on her daily visit. Sue liked hearing the stories Chris translated. But she wasn't ready to put on a smile and tell stories today.

"Not that I mind. About your accent," the dog said, or seemed to say. "I don't speak such good Navajo myself. I do better in Hopi. But I don't like the Hopi stories about me. They always kill me. Of course I always do die in the end, but they could at least recognize that I'm a god before they arrange to kill me."

"You're not a god," Chris said. "You're a big ugly dog and you're distracting me. Why don't you go home?"

The dog bared its teeth at her. She noticed that it was very thin, and its fur was dirty. Great, all she needed, a stray dog adopting her. "Go on," she yelled, "git!"

She looked for something to throw, but there was nothing except books and the glass snowstorm paperweight Sue had given her for Christmas the year they were 18. The year before they found out about the cancer.

The dog grinned at her and trotted off a few paces, keeping its head turned to watch her all the way. When it was in the parking lot, safely out of range, it sat down on a shaded patch of black asphalt and started licking its crotch.

Behind her, someone pushed the door open. "Who're you shouting at?" said Warren. "Need some help?"

Warren's white T-shirt and shorts were damp with sweat, and he smelled worse than the dog. His long, thin, hairy legs stuck out under the shorts.

"It's nothing," Chris said. "Just a stray dog."

"Where?" Warren pushed up against her at the window. Chris moved back a few inches. When she looked again, the dog wasn't there any more. "What did it look like? Skinny yellow bitch?"

"More or less, yes," Chris said.

Warren laughed gustily. "That wasn't a *dog*, Chris. That was that damn coyote bitch that's been coming out of the hills at night and rummaging through the dumpster. You should have called me. I brought the .22 up to my office the other day so I could shoot it if it shows up again."

"Isn't that kind of" Chris paused, thinking about a loaded gun, and students all over the campus.

"You bleeding-heart Easterners are all alike," Warren said. "You don't understand. They're vermin. You have to keep them under control." He sat down on the edge of the desk and began rifling through her papers. "Still wasting your time with that translation jazz, I see."

"I don't think it's a waste of time," Chris said. "Many of the original translators misunderstood the native tales completely. They imposed their own views —"

"Yeah, yeah, white male chauvinist European culture swamping the poor Indians," Warren interrupted. "You feminists all tell the same story. Ever occur to you that you're imposing your views just as much as the last translators did? It doesn't make any difference anyway. You'll never get anywhere if you take the time to work out each and every story from the original transcriptions. I'm only telling you this for your own good, Chris. Of course I defended you to Artie when the subject came up."

"Artie?" He must mean Dr. Arthur Gershauer. Chairman of the department.

"We were just playing tennis together," Warren said. "See, Chris, that's the kind of chance you're always missing. You need to get to know the senior faculty. Do you think I like chasing a ball in this weather? Hell, no! But when I found out old Artie was a tennis nut, I signed up for lessons right away. Spent the whole fall semester working my butt off, and now it's paying off. Of course he beats me regular, but that's part of the bigger game, y'know what I mean?"

"I'd like to know," Chris said slowly, "just what you were defending."

"Lighten up, Chris," Warren advised her. "It's no big thing. Just, Artie was wondering about your research. So I told him, I said, Chris may seem to you like she's just screwing around learning languages that nobody needs to know these days, repeating work that's already been done by perfectly competent translators back in the '20s when the material was collected, but one of these days she'll straighten out and do some real anthropology like the rest of us. Take my paper on the sexual correlatives of sophomore girls' soft-drink selections, I said to him, I'm giving Chris a photocopy so she can see some modern, *relevant* work. Anthropology as a living discipline," Warren said, almost reverently.

"Photocopy is the only way you'll be able to disseminate that," Chris said, "no refereed journal would accept it."

"Hey, Chris, relax. What is it, that time of the month or something? Now you just don't worry about a thing. I'm sure old Artie will take that kind of female emotional thing into account when he's deciding who to keep on here. I know I must have told him a dozen times, I said, now don't you worry about Chris's little lapses; she can't help what she does at those times, you know what I mean? Especially with her sad family situation. I told Artie just today, I said, you can't expect Chris to concentrate the way a man would with her sister dying and all; you know how women's emotions kind of take them over at these times. Now you call me if that coyote shows up again, Chrissie baby. Old Warren will be right to the rescue." He mimed putting an imaginary rifle to his shoulder and pulling the trigger. "Blam-blam."

"Got to keep them feminists under control," Chris said.

After Warren left she closed and locked the door, then the window. She closed the venetian blinds. After a few minutes she could feel the cool air blowing in from the air-conditioning vent. Soon it would be too cold again; student folklore told stories of icicles being found on graduate students who sat still for too long in the sub-basement study cubicles. In an hour she would be covered with goose-pimples and would open the window again, risking the wrath of the dean, the committee on environmental standards, and the Turner Hall janitor. The janitor was the only one she feared. Not that it mattered today; it was getting late, she needed to go to the hospital.

Instead of leaving, though, she sat fiddling with a ballpoint pen at her desk. At her elbow was a stack of reference books: *Navajo Coyote Tales, The Trickster Motif in Southwestern Cultures, A Shorter Navajo-English Dictionary, Daughters of the Earth.*

Chris opened the bottom drawer on the right-hand side and pulled out a stack of papers. She fanned them out in front of her until she could read the titles over and over again. Fifty offprints of her first article. Twenty-five of the second; the *Journal of Southwestern Anthropology* was getting chintzier with the reprints. Not that it mattered; nobody at Laguna College had ever asked for a single copy of her published work.

The computer screen glowed green in front of her. She dialed up the periodicals index and typed in her own name. Christine van Knappert, four articles, two citations. There she was in the index. She was real. Her work was real. Wasn't it? Warren was just blowing smoke.

She was still looking at the screen when the telephone rang.

THE HOT AIR AND THE AFTERNOON SUNLIGHT OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL struck Chris like a blow on the face.

"I'm sorry, Ms. van Knappert," someone in white was saying. "We did try to get you here as soon as we could."

"I didn't notice how hot it was coming over here," Chris said. "There was a lot of traffic on the freeway." That was relevant, wasn't it? Not the heat, but the traffic. She had to be careful to make sense. Little lapses. Women's emotions kind of take them over at these times. She studied her own words carefully, from the cool dark room inside her head that had opened up when the telephone rang, and decided they were close enough to relevant. Forty-five minutes stuck in traffic on the freeway. Common enough, this time of the afternoon. And long enough for Sue to die alone.

"We did everything we could," the person in white said.

"I know you did." The people at the hospital wanted to be reassured. They wanted to know that she wasn't going to cry, or scream, or throw things, or sue them. The bereaved often acted irrationally. If she gave them what they wanted perhaps they would shut up and go away.

"Would you like one of our chaplains to sit with you?"

"*No*," Chris said, startling herself with the vehemence of her refusal, and then, more calmly, "No, thank you. I ... I'd just like to be by myself for a little while, if I may."

THEY LET HER ALONE THEN, TO STAND IN the shaded part of the concrete breezeway that led to the hospital parking garage. She wished she were back in her office. If she could be back there, in the cool air, it could be three o'clock again and Sue wouldn't be dead yet. She could almost see how to get there; stepping sideways through the world, like Coyote when he fell into the kiva.

The yellow dog was scratching itself in the parking slot next to Chris's car. She looked more closely this time and decided that Warren might be right, perhaps it was a coyote. Only, of course, it couldn't be the same animal as the one she'd seen earlier. Not 40 miles away.

"I wouldn't go back to the office if I were you," the coyote said.

"I. Am. Not. Hallucinating." Chris fumbled in her purse for the keys.

"You translate the words," Coyote said, "but you don't pay attention to the text. I tell you, something smells wrong there. Now me, I always trust warning signs — and my nose. If there's one thing I understand, it's garbage."

When Chris started the car, blue smoke puffed out of the muffler pipe and filled the low-ceilinged parking structure with a bad-smelling haze. Blinking through it, she saw only a dark oil stain on the concrete of the next parking slot. With a lot of imagination, someone could have claimed that the oil stain was shaped sort of like a dog. Or a coyote. Or a wolf. It could have been taken for any yellow-gray animal with fleas and long yellow teeth and protruding ribs.

"WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN, CHRIS?" ARTHUR GERSHAUER demanded as she walked into the cool darkness of Turner Hall. "Disappearing in the middle of the day like that."

"Sue," she said, and stopped there, teeth clenching around the words.

Dr. Gershauer put on his sad look. "Your sister's illness. I know, I know, very sad situation, m'dear, but we do have standards to keep up. Come along, I want to talk to you."

"Standards?" She felt dazed by sun and heat and — just the heat, that was all; the hospital had been cool and — don't think about the hospital. Think about what the hell Dr. Gershauer meant, *standards*, when her classes and office hours were all in the morning and she'd had nothing scheduled for this afternoon anyway. Maybe she was wrong about that. Maybe he'd told her he wanted a meeting and she'd forgotten. Mulling over that got Chris through the secretary's domain and into Dr. Gershauer's private office. It was three times as large as hers and not nearly as cluttered.

He was talking. Something about not wanting her to take this personally, a hard decision, two equally, he might say superbly, qualified candidates. He couldn't be talking about her and Warren and the tenure-track position. Could he? Nobody would use the word *superb* in the same sentence with Warren.

"But when a flagrant violation of professional conduct is brought to my attention — " Dr. Gershauer let the sentence hang and looked at her expectantly.

Chris sat up straighter. "What's Warren done?"

The sad mask was back on, making Dr. Gershauer's lips droop while his eyes still sparkled with bright anticipation. "You can't blame Warren for this, Chris. I'm afraid it's all too clear. Who but you would have been motivated to remove and destroy your student evaluations file?"

"*What?*"

Dr. Gershauer shook his head slowly. "You know how important we consider teaching here at Laguna College, Chris. Oh, research is vital, of course! But the single most important quality we look for in a new colleague is, will he — or she, as the case may be — truly have the best interests of the students at heart? Will he — or she — be able to communicate the excitement of anthropology as a living discipline?"

It was all bull, of course. Chris actually liked teaching, she looked forward to her classes and took extra time with students after class, but she'd never expected that to do her any good when the time came to choose between her and Warren. Everybody knew that publications were what counted. "I believe, Dr. Gershauer," she said carefully, "you will find that my student evaluations show that I've been most successful in — er — communicating the excitement of anthropology."

"As a living discipline," Gershauer completed his favorite phrase, and suddenly Chris remembered who else had used that phrase recently. "I hardly think your file would be as glowing as all that. In that case, why would you have removed it? Most unprofessional. I can see that you might have expected to get away with it. If you hadn't been seen leaving these offices with the folder in your hand "

"Who said he saw me?"

"I hardly think it is necessary to go into that. This isn't a trial, after all; just a friendly private meeting." Dr. Gershauer linked his fingers before him and studied their interlacing while he rumbled out a few more sonorous phrases. Chris looked past him at the poster on his office door. A miserable-looking kitten clutched a branch by its front paws, obviously on the verge of slipping off. *Hang in there, baby!* was the caption.

It had to be Warren. Warren, who needed to discredit her in some way if he wanted to stay at Laguna. Warren, who played tennis with the chairman, who must have found a way to get his hands on the keys to Gershauer's office.

If she could only get Gershauer to say who had accused her, she'd know for sure. Because whoever claimed he'd seen her take the file had to be lying. And how could he be sure the file wouldn't be found, unless he'd stolen it himself?

Gershauer kept going on and going on. No possibility of reinstatement, naturally. They'd let her finish out the year. He made this sound like a great favor; Chris wondered idly what they'd do if she just walked out and left someone else to cover her classes.

People did just quit on you. Sue, for instance.

"I have to go," she said in the middle of one of Gershauer's sonorous sentences.

"Now, just a minute, young lady! I'm not through —"

"But I am," Chris said. "Or wasn't that what you were telling me?"

Gershauer's face turned purple around his gold-rimmed glasses. Whatever he might have said was cut off by a sharp noise outside.

"A car — " Gershauer started to say.

"No. A rifle."

Chris was right. They found Warren in the doorway of his office, clasping both hands above his head. The rifle lay catty-corner across his desk.

"A beautiful shot, if I do say so myself!"

"You're not supposed to have the windows open," Dr. Gershauer said.

"What did you shoot?" Chris peered out at the dusty parking lot. There was no big yellow-gray body stiffening outside, and she felt an irrational sense of relief. "I don't think you hit anything."

"I most certainly did," Warren said. "I got that big coyote bitch that's been messing around here. See?"

Chris looked where he pointed. The red dust was spattered with dark spots, an irregular curving line heading up into the hills.

"You bastard," she said.

"Do you have any idea what this does to our air-conditioning bill?" Dr. Gershauer demanded.

"Do you know how long it can take a wounded animal to die? She could be in agony right now."

"Why didn't you call the custodial staff? It's their responsibility to deal with this sort of thing."

Chris left Warren and Dr. Gershauer arguing about responsibility, let the doors of Turner Hall swing shut behind her, stood for a moment breathing in dust and sun and baking afternoon heat.

The blood trail led across the northeast corner of the parking lot. Chris lost it there, but she could see a narrow track leading up into the hills; a trail big enough for animals, not for humans. And there were fresh paw prints in the dust of the trail.

These hills were steeper than they looked, and the underbrush was full of burrs and stickers and dry branches that caught on her jeans and sneaked under the leather straps of her sandals. Chris pulled her shirt tail out of her jeans, bent double to mop her forehead, and climbed on. Every so often there was a spot of blood, dark and solid in the dust. Her side hurt. Rocks slithered and crumbled under her sandals.

At the crest of the first hill the coyote trail intersected a hiking trail, broad and almost level. Chris stood for a moment looking down at the suburb of Laguna City; at its red tiled roofs and swimming pools and the green lawns around the college campus. The smog hovered low over the hills; there was no way to see 40 miles north, to the cool white rooms of the hospital, where Sue was no longer waiting for her.

Nobody, in fact, was waiting for her; except, possibly, one flea-bitten coyote whose trail crossed the hiking path and went as close to vertically up the next slope as gravity and rock slides would allow. The stitch in Chris's side was much worse by the time she had scrambled over that second hill. It seemed to be getting dark, too; clouds rolling in from the ocean, covering the sky, spitting out little preliminary bursts of raindrops as hard and sharp as gunfire.

"About time you showed up," said Coyote.

Chris squinted at the pale yellowish-gray patch between two gray boulders. Her vision blurred and for a moment she thought she was looking at an old woman with dirty gray hair streaking over her shoulders.

The bullet hole was small and black and sinister in Coyote's side; her sparse fur was matted with blood. She was panting heavily, and Chris thought she heard a bubbling sound with each breath. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"It's the other way around," Coyote said. "I can help you. Only you won't follow your nose." She scratched around the hole; dirty, long-fingered hands pulling aside a gray rag of a shirt. Her withered thighs and sparse yellow-gray pubic hair showed under the shirt. Chris looked away politely.

"Look," Coyote said, "we know what my problem is. That *cabron* killed me. It's going to take a little while, is all. Damn white eyes, bad as a Hopi. I told you, they never will admit I'm a god before I die. Now what's your problem?"

"You wouldn't understand," Chris said, but she squatted down beside Coyote and told her anyway, everything jumbled together, Sue's long dying in the cool white hospital bed and Warren sweaty from his tennis game with the chairman, and the missing file.

"Hah!" Coyote said when she finished. "I told you, if there's one thing I understand, it's garbage. Scratch behind my ear, there's a flea."

Chris scratched, and felt fur under her fingers; looked down and saw an old woman dying. "I don't understand," she said.

Coyote snarled, but listlessly, as if she no longer had the energy to do it right. "Damn, I hate this part of the circle, when I'm so naive." Her yellow eyes glared at Chris. "Never mind, I'll learn. Have we heard the story about Badger hiding my kill in his garbage heap yet? It happened, they say. Coyote Woman was hunting …."

Thunder rolled overhead, punctuating the story. Chris squatted on the rocks and listened. "I don't understand," she said. "I've never seen a thunderstorm in southern California."

"When Coyote Woman goes into a new body," Coyote said, "the sky breaks open. Hah! Happens all the time. I'll understand better when I'm you. Touch my wound. Blood helps. That's right, smear it on your hands."

A flash of lightning turned the rocks and Coyote sheet-white for a moment, the blood black on Chris's hands.

"Ahhh, that hurts," Coyote said, and her forelimbs jerked out stiffly.

CHRIS CAME DOWN FROM THE HILLS with the morning sun. Where it touched the dust, she stepped; where the light played over a juniper bush or a manzanilla shrub, she stopped. Two steps, three, halt and step, she danced down the mountain.

It was after nine, people time, when the sunlight and Chris reached Turner Hall. She wondered if someone else had taken over her Anthro 113 class, or if the students had gathered and whispered and drifted away without knowing where the professor had gone. A pity, that. She had liked teaching.

She stopped to collect a plain manila folder, then went on to finish her work here. Warren hadn't taken over the class, anyway; he was in his office with his feet on the desk. He froze, hands behind his head, when she drifted in. "Are you all right?"

"Never better," Chris said with a smile. "Call your pal Artie and ask him to step in here for a minute."

"Yes, I think we'd better both go and see the chairman," Warren said. "He was worried sick about …. Hey! Put that thing down! You don't know how to use it."

"Would you bet your life on that, Warren?" Chris bared her teeth at him over the shining barrel of the .22.

"It's not loaded," Warren said.

"Then you won't mind if I play with it." Still grinning, she lifted the rifle and sighted down the barrel at Warren's narrow chest.

"DR. GERSHAUER!" Warren bellowed.

"Oh," Chris said, "I thought you called him Artie. Being as you're such good friends, and all." She put the rifle back on its shelf. "Don't worry, Warren. I just dropped by to clear something up, actually."

"Chris, dear!" Arthur Gershauer boomed, striding into Warren's narrow office. Behind him, two departmental secretaries tried to peek over his shoulder, then fled back down the hall. "I can't tell you how happy and relieved we all are to see you …. The stress of overwork …." He boomed on, rumbling on about the special stresses of professional life on young women, *family*-oriented women if he might say so, knowing how attached Chris had been to her poor sister ….

"Leave Sue out of it," Chris interrupted. "I just stopped by to give you this."

"What is it?" Dr. Gershauer looked at the folder in her hand as though it were a poisonous snake or a sexual discrimination suit.

"My, my," Chris said, "and you were so anxious to have it back. My student evaluation file, of course. That coyote that's been hanging out around here tipped over the dumpster last night and I saw this laying in the trash."

"That's impossible!" Warren exclaimed. His eyes flickered up to

Continued on page 87

DEAN MORRISSEY

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"Sleeper Flight" is from Morrissey's first children's book of fantasy, Ship of Dreams, *published in 1994. BELOW RIGHT: In his forthcoming book, a "Checker Cab" travels through the land of the Great Kettles.*



Every Picture Tells A Story

Artist Dean Morrissey takes us on a voyage to his universe of imagination and wonder.

THERE IS A REALM THAT IS NOT SUBJECT to the laws of physics, the constraints of time, or the parameters of reality; a place where perspective is relative and the fantastic is the norm. A place inhabited not by action heroes, but by superheroes of a different sort. They are good-hearted and kindly caretakers whose province it is to oversee the various phenomena that make up the regular workings of the universe such as shooting stars, time, and tides.

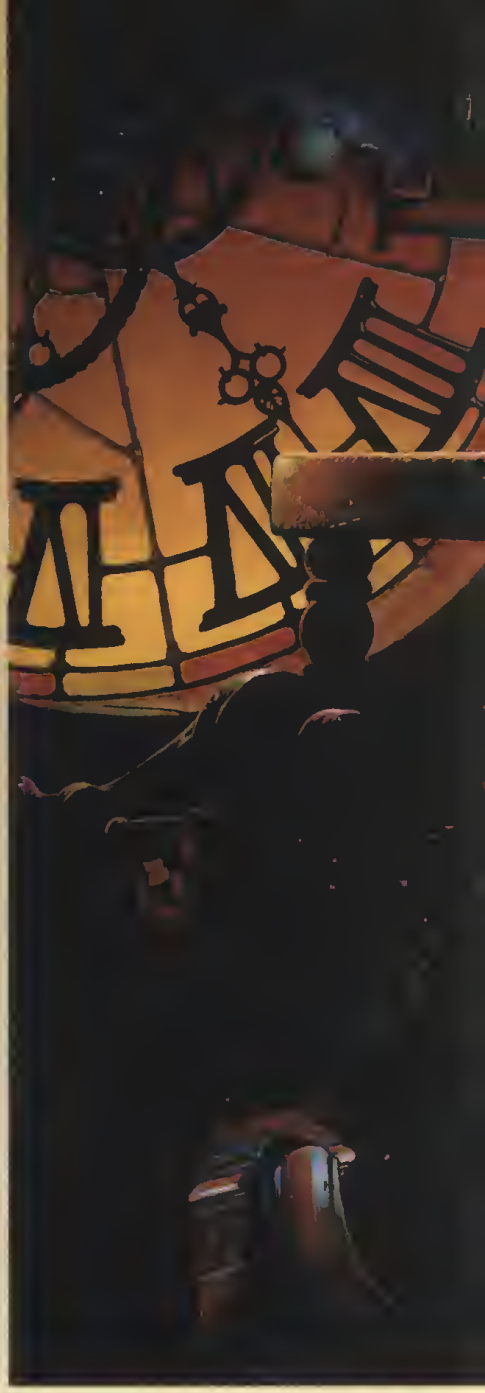
While science has its set of explanations for these occurrences, artist and author Dean Morrissey has another: Imagination knows no boundaries. His imagination explains these wonders as the workings of the inhabitants of the islands known as The Great Kettles. Its residents — the Sandman, Mother Nature, Father Time, the Man in the Moon, and others — sometimes journey across the Sea of Time just to look in on us.

Morrissey's luminous paintings of these characters and their realm are visual stories in themselves, each filled with intricate details and whimsical touches. An extraordinarily talented artist, Morrissey's style is reminiscent of the old masters. He has the unique ability to transform common objects into radiant images that seem to glow from within.



BY LINDA D'AGOSTINO CLINGER







A self-taught artist, Morrissey worked as a lineman for a power company by day. He painted at night and began to show his work at sci-fi/fantasy conventions in 1978. This began a decade of creating award-winning book covers to illustrate the stories of others. But his imagination was teeming with stories of his own to be illustrated. Jane and Howard Frank, prominent figures in the sci-fi/fantasy art world, were early supporters of Morrissey's work and encouraged him to illustrate his own book.

As evidenced by the incredible detail in his ingenious paintings, Morrissey is a master storyteller. Something new waits to be discovered upon each viewing of his art. The wind stirs tiny golden stars hidden in the fallen leaves. Bells chime softly as they float in the night air. Gears whir and gauges hum,



powered by bellows and balloons, assorted gizmos, and even goldfish. Every picture tells a story.

One of the stories Morrissey wanted to tell was about the Sandman: "For a long time," he recalls, "I had thought it would be interesting to flesh him out a little bit; to give him dimension beyond sprinkling sleeping sand, and use him in some way that was meaningful. But I let the idea go, thinking that someday I'd give it more thought, and moved on to other things"

That's when a red wagon appeared, serving as the catalyst to lead him back to his idea. It led him all the way to the realm of The Great Kettles and the realization of his dreams. To the average person, a rusty wagon is destined only for one last ride, but to someone like Morrissey, it can soar to the stars. One day, he and his wife saw such a wagon discarded in a neighbor's trash. At his wife's urging, he retrieved the abandoned toy and put it in his basement where it waited for him patiently: "It started to get my attention every time I went downstairs," he explains. "All of a sudden, the perfect tie-in to the Sandman came to me — that the way to make *his* universe accessible was through a boy and his wagon. And that was the beginning"

It was the beginning of Morrissey's award-winning, best-selling children's book, *Ship of Dreams*, published in 1994 by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in association with Mill Pond Press, Inc., publisher of Morrissey's popular limited edition art prints. In *Ship of Dreams*, a little boy's ordinary red wagon becomes the vehicle for an extraor-

TOP LEFT: In "A Sudden Gust," from Ship of Dreams, *Joey finds himself whisked away to the magical land of the Sandman. LEFT BELOW: Morrissey credits this cover, for the book Cats in Space, as the painting that helped steer his work firmly into his own magical realm. ABOVE: In "The Perpetual Absolute Standard Time (P.A.S.T.) Clock" Father Time takes a break from his never-ending work.*

dinary adventure into the star-filled skies where he meets the elusive Sandman. In addition to being the benevolent herald of sleep, Morrissey's Sandman has additional duties. He commemorates the birth of each child by hanging a new star in the heavens with the child's name engraved on it. He collects their forgotten dreams for safekeeping, and above all, he visits every child, every night, without exception. "Throughout history, one of the roles of myth and folklore has been to underscore ideals of human behavior. I liked the concept of an itinerant and consistent shepherd who, every night, checks in on you to make sure you're okay," says Morrissey. "That's his job; that's what he does. The idea of consistency is a human ideal."

But how something so ordinary as a wagon inspires the extraordinary vehicles and inventions he envisions is one thing for which Morrissey can offer no explanation. "Some days I just hang on to the paintbrush and go along for the ride. The genesis of an idea is beyond my own grasp," he elaborates. "And they don't usually come gift-wrapped, but rather, just as the seed of an idea. Keith Richards once said that ideas are all there like a procession. You have to listen and snatch them and make them your own."

When Morrissey makes an idea his own, he does it with pencil sketches, notes, and sometimes sculpture before painting the idea in oil on canvas. He also writes a brief narrative of the scene as it relates to the entire story. Consequently he is most often asked which comes first; the picture or the story: "It varies," he comments. "The pictures fire the imagination. Both come from the same place; they're different manifestations of the same creative source. My thought process is a constant swirl of images and ideas."

The characters Morrissey imagines and creates are a conglomeration of the characteristics of people who impacted his life in some way: "They are the people who left impressions. The way my mind processes them, they come out as characters. Henry, in *Ship of Dreams*, is several kids I grew up with. He was a little older, more worldly; he was seven; I was five. Joey is every child; I was Joey. I was the kid who used to daydream and doodle in school."





Morrissey continues to weave a rich and meaningful tapestry for generations to come. His next book will be published in 1997. In it,



his character Joey will be transported from his attic to the realm of The Great Kettles due to an amazing set of circumstances. There he will see the first checkered cab (a coach drawn by a checkered horse), and meet the residents, including Morrissey's first female character, Mother Nature, whom he refers to as a woman of substance. "She has a major job to do," he explains. "I like the whole idea of the spirit of this character. Her spirit is in everything around her."

When asked where he would transport himself, if he had at his disposal the kinds of fantastic vehicles that grace his art, Morrissey laughs and comments, "Every day I have the opportunity to do so and to go wherever I want." And, he adds, "I am constantly aware of how fortunate I am to be able to make a living doing something that I love. It is a luxury, and I'm grateful for it. The work is such a part of me, though, that I know if I couldn't earn a living at it, I'd be doing it just the same. I bring everything I have to bear into everything I do."

LEFT: Morrissey's cover painting for John Morressy's book Kedrigern and the Charming Couple *shares the artist's own imagery. ABOVE: From his next children's book, Mother Nature inspects her handiwork while floating in "The Wooden Swan."*

BY MARK SUMNER

Daggerfall *offers role players a continent worth of adventure.*

THEY SAY THAT GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES. IF SO, THEN THE INVERSE IS often true. Or at least it is when it comes to computer games: Large space can produce a disappointing game. In fact, the huge storage space of a CD-ROM can often conceal a game that is surprisingly small. Padded out by hours of canned video, the huge space of a CD may in fact conceal that the actual game is nothing but a few grooves in the disc's shiny surface.

Rare is the game that really takes advantage of the massive capacity to shovel in hundreds of megabytes of actual game play. *Daggerfall*, from Bethesda Softworks, is one of those rare exceptions. To get an idea of just how big this game is, a minimal install can cost you 50MB of hard drive space. A medium install takes nearly 100MB. Large install? Oh, about 300MB. And the full, all out, give me everything install — 500MB. Very little of that is taken up by video. That's a lot of gaming.

In game design, each option allowed to the player can result in thousands of problems for the programmer. That's why so much of the current crop of fantasy games consist of simplistic quests. They're nothing more than a series of switches to be thrown. "Pick up the key. Check. Put key in lock. Check. Take item from chest. Check." Your choices in such games are essentially zero. Don't put the key in the lock, and you'll never get farther. Miss one step, and you'll never finish the game. Such games can provide a decent length of game play, but they do so at the expense of all flexibility. What Bethesda set out to do with *Daggerfall* was create a game at the opposite end of the scale — ultimate flexibility. "Pick up key. Toss key out window. Mash chest open with hammer. Throw object right after key. Move on."



Bethesda Software's Daggerfall *provides loads of computer fantasy gaming in an immense landscape*



Daggerfall does provide you with an overarching plot line. The king of *Daggerfall*, a wise an honorable man, has fallen in battle. But he doesn't stay safely dead. Instead he has returned, raising a spectral army to plague the land he once ruled. Under the direction of the emperor, you've been sent to *Daggerfall*. Your mission is to discover the cause of the dead king's restless ways, and return peace to the land. You also have another task, a task which seems like a small personal affair. Trust me, it's not.

Within that storyline, *Daggerfall* does provide a great deal of flexibility. There are certainly actions will advance you toward your goal, and those that will take you farther away. Make enough of the wrong decisions, and you'll soon find it exceptionally difficult to get back on track, but to reach this position you'll have to be either aggressively ignorant, or actually out to thwart your emperor. It's not perfect freedom — the game still places restrictions on what you can use and how you can act — but it's probably as close as any computer game has come to date.

Then there's the sheer size of the land. One of the goals was to provide the biggest role-playing game ever in terms of sheer space to wander. That goal has certainly been met. *Daggerfall* is beyond big, it's immense. Should you choose to walk between towns, you'll find that every foot of the terrain is there and at the correct scale. So if two towns are located a dozen miles apart, how long will it take you to walk? About three hours. Fortunately, for those not interested in seeing every rock and tree along the way, there is a fast travel method which hurries you along.

Within this complete landscape are dozens — if not hundreds — of towns, cities, hamlets, dungeons, castles, caves, and more. There are thousands of non-player characters ready to converse with you, and even more monsters out to rend you in half. This is not a game that you're going to finish off in a few hours.

Those that are familiar with older role-playing games, or with good old paper systems, will find the character creation scheme in *Daggerfall* quite familiar. You'll find all

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the old standard categories like "Strength" and "Agility" there to help you define your character, along with a large number of vital skills. You can choose to define your character in the traditional way, by choosing a character class — fighter, mage, etc. — and plugging in numbers, but *Daggerfall* provides a more intriguing method.

Since you're going to be spending a lot of time guiding your surrogate around the landscape, it helps to have a character whose



responses mirror your own. To that end, you can elect to start character creation by answering a list of questions. *Daggerfall* takes your responses to such questions and uses them to build a database of your character. This is then used to suggest the best fit between your nature and the available roles. Similarly, the game also offers an option to have the background of the character randomly generated, or to create a history by answering another series of questions. In this case, I suggest you take the time to answer the questions. There's information here that can be of great assistance later in the game.

Once past the character creation phase, you'll face one of *Daggerfall*'s brief moments of multimedia. The disc is not crowded with such film clips, but when you hit one, you'll know you've reached a significant milestone. All of the video is well done, but this opening one is particularly effective for setting a mood. Be advised, the video clips contain vital information. Hit the skip key on this segment, and it's your neck on the line.

Once past the opening scene, you're plunged straight into the first dungeon. The engine of the game provides a look that's very like Bethesda's previous game *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*. Those that are familiar with *Arena* can stick with the control scheme used there. However, this scheme can be a bit clumsy when battling the tough critters of *Daggerfall*. If you prefer, you can customize the interface to fit your needs, or switch to an interface that mimics another of Bethesda's hits, *Terminator: Future Shock*. I think most people, especially those that have wasted inordinate amounts of time playing *Doom*, will find the *Terminator*-style interface much easier to control in a crisis situation.

Once you escape the underworld, you'll get your first chance to chat with people that don't want to immediately skewer you. *Daggerfall*'s system for carrying on a dialog with non-player characters is simple, yet offers considerably flexibility. A list of topics is provided. You pick one, and get another list of



modifiers, and so one. Soon you've got a complete sentence. It sounds a little clumsy, but in practice it works pretty well, and it does allow you to carry on a conversation that has more substance than most RPGs.

So, after years of waiting, does *Daggerfall* live up to expectations? Well, yes, but then, my expectations three years ago weren't quite what they are today. The graphics engine provides a nice first person perspective, very sim-



In Daggerfall, *first you create your character (left), then venture into a dungeon (top) before traveling across open land (above).*

ilar to arena. However, *Daggerfall* is limited to standard VGA. Compared with new products, which use higher resolution, the graphics look a little dated. Monsters and characters seem to have been formed from relatively small images, and can get extremely blocky when seen close up. There are some effects that work beautifully — wait until you experience a snow storm — but overall the graphics of *Daggerfall* are a bit disappointing.

That said, *Daggerfall* is still an important, impressive game. This is the most completely conceived, fully realized RPG ever to land on your computer. There is so much room in this game, that you could play it 10 times and never meet the same people twice. Its sheer scope gives it a quality missing from other games.

Requirements: 486/66 or better CPU, 8MB RAM, sound card. Mouse required, joystick optional, VGA, 2x CD-ROM drive, 50MB for minimal install, as much as 500MB for a complete install.

LucasArt's Afterlife *puts you in charge of two tough jobs*

If you're looking for that really big promotion, a position has come open. Wanted: God. Must be able to manipulate heaven and hell, handle crises of epic proportions, and dispense justice to both the just and the foul. Apply: LucasArts' *Afterlife*.

"God games" go back several years. The first to pull off the gloves and fully embrace the player-as-deity was *Bullfrog's Populace*, where

tiny folks lived and died to further the player's control over the world. *Populace* was followed by a dozen other games with similar themes.

In this game, you're not in charge of what goes on in the world. You're task is to handle what happens after those poor hardworking creatures have meet their end. They come to you first for judgment, then for punishment or reward.

It should be pointed out that technically the player is not really God in *Afterlife*. You're a Demiurge, kind of a really high-ranking angel, who the Big Guy has put in charge. And it's not our world you have to judge, it's an alien planet — apparently a relatively minor sideline of the big game.

Souls of these departed creatures come to you complete with records of how they fared in life. Good souls that are bound for heaven must be presented the appropriate reward. They also expect a system that runs smoothly, with easy access to all of heaven's facilities. You can think of heaven like a big strip mall and hotel complex. The nicer you can make it, the better. Build plenty of roads, keep a good staff on hand and you'll find yourself with a heaven that runs smoothly. Mess up, and you'll be amazed at how quick these folks can turn on you.

Down in hell, your priorities are reversed. You can't just set up a few fiery pits and leave it at that. You've got to go out of your way to make things unrelentingly nasty. Leave lots of gaps between areas so that travel is difficult. Put in some roads, but only enough to make sure of some really snarly traffic jams. Keep the heat turned up.

In both places, you'll find that providing the correct reward or punishment is important. This planet may be alien, but it's plagued by an all too familiar set of "Seven Deadly Sins". Each of these sins requires a matching punishment. On the other hand, good souls are blessed with one of the "Seven Heavenly Virtues". All of which require their own special form or reward.

Should heaven become overcrowded, or hell start bursting at the seams, you can meddle in the beliefs of the aliens on the planet. With the right prompting, you can urge these aliens to sign up for the heaven express or the down elevator. Watch out, though. Aliens have this nasty habit of not dying right when you need them. The delay between when you start urging changes and when you start getting dead souls can make altering the belief system like steering an ocean liner on a go-kart track.

Afterlife has a lot of similarity with games like Maxis' *SimCity*, and even more resemblance to Bullfrog's *Theme Park*. If you enjoyed these games, and if you can thrive on a diet of religious humor, then *Afterlife* is for you. Serious strategy gamers may find the humor overwhelming, and it can get irritating at times, but my advice is to lighten up.

Requirements: 486/66 CPU or higher, 8MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, sound card. ❧

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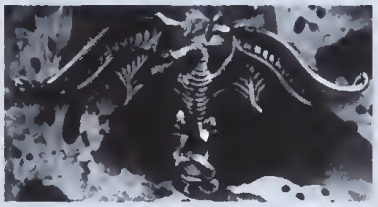
FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 26

a Nishga version recounted by Agnes Haldane of the Wolf clan of Gitkateen (*Wisdom of the Myth Tellers*, Sean Kane), a tribal princess picking berries in the forest steps on a bit of bear scat and mutters angry remarks about the bears. When the other women head for home, her basket breaks; repairing it, she is left behind. Two handsome men appear and tell her they've come to fetch her and lead her from the forest. Instead of leading her home, they take her to the village of the Bear People. The princess tricks the Bear People into believing she is a woman of great power, and as a result she ends up marrying the son of the Bear Chief. She lives with him rather happily, and gives birth to two fine bear sons. But during a period of hibernation, her own brothers find her husband's cave and kill the bear in a rescue attempt. Her husband has foreseen this event. "When they skin me," he'd instructed her, "tell them to burn my bones so that I may go on to help my children. At my death they shall take human form and become skillful hunters. Now listen as I sing my dirge song. This you must remember and take to your father. My cloak he shall don as his dancing garment. His crest shall be the Prince of Bears."

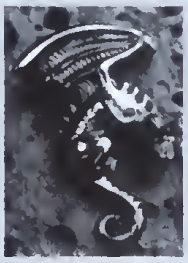
The bear's sacrifice of his life for the benefit of human beings is not an unusual theme. In many North American myths, the animals were the First People—stories recount how bear, or coyote, or eagle, or deer gave us the gift of fire, while in other stories the gifts of language, hunting skills, even love-making come from animal sources. While we've come to expect such respectfulness toward and from other species in native lore, it can also be found on the other side of the world—in the stories of the Ainu of Japan. "In the Ainu world," notes Gary Snyder (in his brilliant study *The Practice of the Wild*) a few human houses are in a valley by a little river. Food is often foraged in the local area, but some of the creatures come down from the inner mountains and up from the deeps of the sea. The animal or fish (or plant) that allows itself to be killed or gathered, and then enters the house to be consumed, is called a 'visitor,' *marapto*. Bear sends his friends the deer down to visit humans. Orca [the Killer Whale] sends his friends the salmon up the streams. When they arrive their 'armor is broken'—they are killed— enabling them to shake off their fur or scale coats and step out as invisible spirit beings. They are then delighted by witnessing the human entertainments—*sake* and music. (They love music.) Having enjoyed their visit, they return to the deep sea or the inner mountains and report, 'We had a wonderful time with the human beings.' The others are then prompted themselves to go on visits. Thus if the humans do not neglect proper hospitality, the beings will be reborn and return over and over."

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The Yaqui (Yoeme) people of the Sonoran desert divide themselves into two related groups: the Vato'im (Baptized Ones) who remain in this world and integrate 17th-century Spanish Catholicism with the rites of their own aboriginal religion, and the Surem (the Enchanted People) who went away to the Wilderness World to preserve the ancient ways. In the extraordinary Deer Dance, still performed at Easter and other times in Arizona and northern Mexico, a dancer takes on the shape, the movements, the consciousness of the sacred deer on the borderline between these two worlds, blessing the ground he walks on. *Yaqui Deer Songs* by Larry Evers and Felipe S. Molina is a beautiful account of an animal–human mythology that is not buried in history but still living, still a vibrant part of everyday life for the modern Yoeme. "*Flower-cover fawn went out, enchanted, from each enchanted flower wilderness world, he went out . . .*," the singers sing as the deer dancer moves, gourd rattles in his hands and strings of rattles bound around his shins. A deer head rises over his own, antlers decorated with flowers. "*. . . . So this now is the deer person, so he is the deer person, so he is the real deer person*" The drummers drum, the dancer leaps, and it is the real deer person indeed. (The Deer Dance is open to respectful watchers during the Easter ritual—Friday through Sunday—at the Yaqui Villages in Tucson, Arizona.)

In addition to the books listed earlier, you'll find animal tales and shape-shifter tales in the excellent reference volumes of the *Panetheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library*, as well as in *American Indian Myths and Legends*, Erdoes and Ortiz, eds.; *Symbolic and Mythological Animals* by J.C. Cooper; *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer; and *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* by Joseph Campbell. For magical bestiaries, I recommend *The Book of Beasts* by T.H. White; *The Book of Imaginary Beings* by Jorge Luis Borges; *Lost Beasts of Britain* by Anthony Dent; and *Medieval Menagerie: Animals in the Art of the Middle Ages*, by Janetta Rebold Benton. *Deerdancer: The Shapeshifter Archetype in Story and in Trance* is a useful collection of stories on the subject, but be forewarned of its pronounced New Age bent. Christina Hole's "Shape-shifting" in *Man, Myth and Magic* #91 is a concise and thorough reference source.

Stories of shape-shifters, animal people, fox wives, cat brides, and bear husbands let us cross the borders between many worlds, at least in imagination. Through the power of story and fantasy, we wear many shapes and inhabit many skins, reminded that we are all living beings beneath the fur, the feathers, the scales.

Long ago (writes native storyteller Johnny Moses) the trees thought they were people.

Long ago the mountains thought they were people.

Long ago the animals thought they were people.

Someday they will say, long ago the humans thought they were people. ❧



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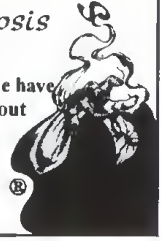
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MUMMY'S BRAIN

Continued from page 44

just a moment more — and there! The lights of a car, a pickup truck. Yes, and you hesitate and you — you can't leave with just this final customer needing in.

My racing mind slows — I don't need yet to tread the graveyards, to race up and down the hills with Dionysian wildness; I have yet another moment with you. Sappy, I admit, but I'm a romantic. I was built that way.

He's coming in — no, five of them. The air is strangely distorted, as if invaders from another planet have burst in; the dust — the dust, of course, which you could not have rid the place entirely of — the dust moves in agitation, in violence. There is something noxious about these boys, obnoxious and dislikable. I — I want to move, to be real, to animate the body, I want my body to rise up with its bandages loose and rotting and my natron-smeared arms reaching out powerfully; I want to be The Mummy and clasp their thick, knotted necks with broken fingers.

A voice, a crashing, harsh voice: "Hey, sweetheart, how's business — "

The first one, gruff, unshaven, smelling of oil and tar and smoke and unclean mud. The others stand behind him like a splattered wall. Grinning.

I hear you clear your throat. "What can I do for you boys?" No response and you say, "You boys ain't from around here, are you?"

"Blue Falls," the front man says. "Workin' a gas well on the county line. And mighty thirsty — " And he licks his chops, as if he's not thinking of drinking beverages in the usual sense of the word. Can you see what he's thinking?

You nod, you wait; you are nervous; I can see it by the way you invisibly shift your weight, fat weight. Fat, fat, fat.

"Damned thirsty," says one of the tall friends behind him. Do you see that? He, too, licks his chops and his beady slashing eyes dart onto your breasts and I am startled by this, I am shocked into awareness, I remember where I am and *what* I am here on this shelf. I am utterly negated. You say, "I'm closin' up now. What can I get you boys?" You are nervous but amazingly brave, and I realize now that it is because you have always lived in this world, that this is *your* world.

"We saw you was closin' up yesterday in the middle of the day," grins the first one, leering at you. "We thought maybe you had a man in here, gettin' some."

"I was cleanin' yesterday. Sorry if I inconvenienced you — "

"In-con-venienced, ma'am? Only because we wanted to take a poke at ya, too — " I think, for the first time, a bandage has moved, has just fallen off of one of my arms. I want to do more, but it is as much as I can do in the body: steal pies and scare cats and touch the necks of little girls and move a sin-



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gle strand of bandage — as much as a fiction can do. I hurt. My Tin Man's heart leaps ineffectually. One of the men has a shotgun, sawed off, dangling at his leg, now lifting —

"What you want from me?" you say, and my insides churn to see you staring like a quivering rock into those barrels.

"What you think, girlie girl?" And — oh, the priests buried in the rocks of the false pyramid turn and shift and scream. I have forgotten that this — this is the sort of world where — oh my God, I cannot stand to hear you holding back the whimpers as they grab you, as they lay you on the table and — what are they — they pull up the flowered skirt and slip; they laugh; together, with a little struggle, they pull down the girdle, your so well-guarded, well-straightened, anxious girdle. White bottom is left in view, with red marks where the seams of the underwear cut too tightly. Your "bottom," as you would call it — it is bigger and whiter than it should be. Admittedly.

You make a motion as if you are going to scream and suddenly they are no longer holding you. You — they — they're stopping! What — they stopped. They've stopped!

I have never seen you so angry, pulling your underwear up, straightening and jumping back into the spandex — or whatever you call it.

"We're just havin' fun!" A big shit-eating grin on the face of the first guy. The others laugh, good-naturedly. *Good naturedly!* Is that what they call it here? "Seriously!"

"Goddamn you," you say. And I see in your face you already know you will always feel guilty for having said it. It's against scripture. But you say it again, *"Goddamn* you." And you don't just say it to these boys.

"Hey, Sis. We been workin' all day, thought we'd have a laugh."

"Some idea of a laugh."

"Really, no hard feelings. We just wanted to see your rear end; it's famous in these parts."

I see your thoughts flash across your body in a palpable wave: *Boys I ain't never seen before talk about my rear end?*

"We're just finished with the job, got our checks, havin' some fun. We'll buy ya' some of that whiskey to show you no hard feelings."

"Screw you."

They all look sheepish now. I think — I think they really did not imagine they would hurt you. And that's what they say: "We didn't mean to hurt you — we're just playin'. Just some boys havin' fun."

You are shaking. "Get the hell out. Get your whiskey and give me the money and get the hell out." And they do and when they close the door you say, "Goddamn you." And there's something lost in your face and seeing it makes me so angry and wild that I rip from my false body and from the whole of the building and land like a specter in the middle of the highway, furiously filled with



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the cranky god-power of electricity, my bindings blazing like lightning, the mummy eyes screaming out the curses I am capable of making: and I am standing in smoke, exhaust; I hear their double cams firing and realize the truck has blasted its self-bewildered way up the highway to Blue Falls.

WHEN I COME BACK IN, you are nearly ready to leave. You've turned over the sign. Your fingers no longer tremble, and your walk seems—less hesitant. I feel—guilty for what has happened. I feel I should have protected you, that my eyes for a moment should have shone through the text-like lines of my fictitious wrappings. I am like a reader finally unable to break into the story where I so yearn to be. I was too shocked to break through a world, to be helpful, to *be* at all.

Too long in the incense-laden air of another world, I've forgotten this is how they do things to each other, how they do everything — even humor — in this Redgunk of universes, in this realm of plastic and knee bandages and mere electricity. I'd forgotten.

You close the door. I know you will not come back. You are looking for Silence, without knowing what or where it is; for the mystery, the meaning, the secret, the Grail. You are looking for it, but along the highways and in the brilliant glass skyscapes of cities, your soul will only move more furiously with the bugs and the hurting snakes of angst. *It's a Redgunk world*, you think to yourself over and over again on busses and on empty downtown streets and in the creaking lousy beds of the transient houses. It is a Redgunk world, you think; maybe with a little more money, you say to yourself, you could find the meaning and the Grail and the hope in those dance clubs and neon-fantasies and corporate coral-worlds that are so indifferent to you.

Truth is, you could find it anywhere, Mary Ann Klugel. Here on the military road in the singing of the cicadas. I want to reach out along the highway and tell this to you as you walk; I want my stiff shadow in the trees next to the cemetery to give you pause and make you stop and make you hear those danged cicadas. You could find it — meaning, hope, the Grail — in me, too, Mary Ann Klugel; in me, the thing on the shelf with the cobwebs already starting and the dust settling and Uncle Joe grumbling in his sleep about coming back, the dust settling even more and the knee bandages staying just knee bandages. You really could find it in me, Mary Ann Klugel, if you'd just take off this one bandage to show the invisible eyes, to show the trembling vacancy behind the plastic face. It is there, Mary Ann Klugel — please see and tell me it is there — in me, in the mummy on the shelf with the cloudy jars of formaldehyde and animal remains; in me, in the emptiness of a false and featureless head; tell me it is there, tell me you feel it, please tell me you feel it in me, that Secret of the Mummy's Brain — and his Heart. ❧

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COYOTE WOMAN

Continued from page 70

the top shelf of his bookcase, where his photocopies of "Sexual Correlatives of Soft Drink Selection in Undergraduate Females," were stacked. "I, I shot that damn coyote."

"Damn shame about these varmints," Chris said sympathetically. "Shoot one, another shows up. They just keep coming back. But you're right about one thing, it was impossible for that file to turn up in the trash."

"Well, you should know," Warren sneered.

He recovered fast; she had to give him points for that. Keeping her eyes on Warren, Chris backed up until she could reach the top shelf of the bookcase. "Where did you hide it, Warren? It wouldn't turn up in the trash because you wouldn't have the guts to just throw it away; you wanted to be sure you could sneak it back into Artie's office in case your little plan didn't work. So I'm betting you put it with your most precious possessions." She lunged and dragged the entire stack of photocopied papers down at once. Halfway through the stack one corner of a plain manila folder stuck out. She pulled it free and handed it to Arthur Gershauer. "Take a look, Artie," she invited him. "And then let Warren explain how my evaluation file just happened to get 'lost' in his office."

"I — ah — She planted it there, of course!" Warren stammered.

Chris grinned. "Wrong move," she advised him. "You should have said that it couldn't possibly be my evaluation file. Now Dr. Gershauer is going to wonder both how the file turned up there and why you were so ready to accept my word about what was in that folder. Aren't you, Artie?"

"I'm sure there is a sensible explanation for everything," said the department chairman.

"Sure there is," Chris agreed. "I'd just love to stick around and hear you and Warren working it out, but I'm afraid I haven't got time. You know how it is when you're a minor culture god, lots of things to do. Stories to tell, garbage to tip over, worlds to weave, whatever comes up." She dropped her key ring on Warren's desk. "Here are my office keys."

"Wait a minute!" Arthur Gershauer moved to block the door. "You can't just go off like that."

"Oh, yes I can," Chris told him. She slipped between the desk and the bookshelves, shoved Warren's office window open with the heel of her hand, and jumped over the low sill.

"Stories to tell," her voice floated back to them, "garbage to rummage through, worlds to weave. And I gotta catch up with my sister, too. There were some stories I meant to tell her; I have to find a place where she's not dead yet. Over this way, I think"

In the dust outside the window there were the tracks of two leather sandals, then the prints of something that ran on four feet; then nothing but a little swirl of red dust. ❧



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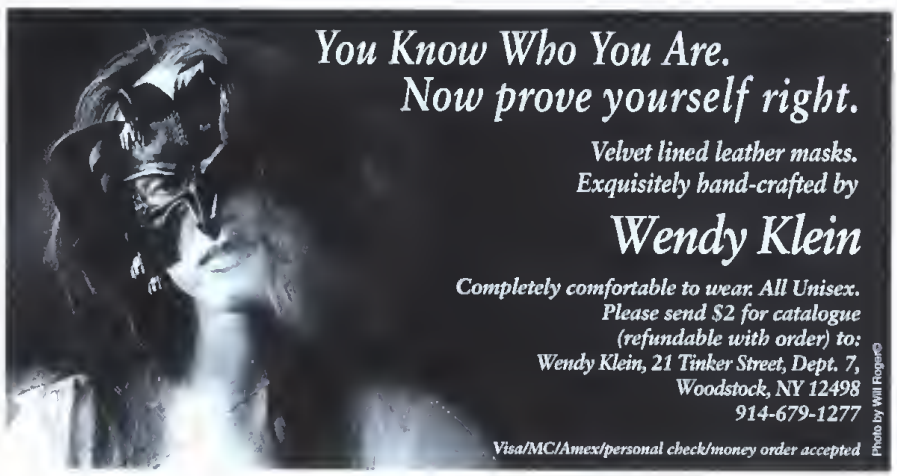
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BOOKS

Continued from page 19

set out on a vacation that will transform both their lives.

Putting contemporary characters into a fantasy setting is not new, but it is done quite well here. The characters are suitably disgusted by the unsanitary living conditions and rotten teeth of Glenraven's peasants, and when Jayjay and Sophie begin to fear for their lives, we get a sense that these are real people who have a lot of things on their minds, who aren't used to having their lives in danger, and who don't want to die yet. Having these contemporary characters in the story makes us imagine how we might react in similar circumstances, which is one of the great joys of reading fantasy.

Their lives are threatened quite soon after their entry into Glenraven. It turns out that the Fodor's guide is not only enchanted, it contains all the remaining magic of an oppressed Glenraven race called the Machnan. In desperation, the Machnan collected all their magic into one artifact. It formed itself into a tour guide, and so the Machnan knew they must take it to the outside world where it would draw to Glenraven the heroes who would save them.

The danger for a fantasy novel with a really clever premise is that once the novelty of the premise wears off, the book will have nothing left to offer. Fortunately, that is not the case here. As the book progresses, we learn more about the problems that each woman has been facing at home, and we see each of them begin to adapt and grow in these new surroundings. Jayjay has been abused by men in her previous marriages. Sophie's daughter was killed in a horseback riding accident, and Sophie hasn't been able to get her life back on track since then. Sophie has a premonition on entering Glenraven that she will die there, and she sometimes feels that would be the best thing for her.

By the time the energy of the initial premise begins to decline, we're caught up with some very compelling characters and with the desire to uncover the secrets of Glenraven. We're glad we made the trip. And we wish that one of our vacations might offer as much excitement.

Jeanne Cavelos

The Cormorant by Stephen Gregory, White Wolf Publishing, date, paperback, $5.99

We read some books to escape to a fascinating alternate universe unlike our world. We read some books to experience thrilling adventures we can never really have. We read some books to vicariously live the life of another person. And we read some books for the joy of seeing the language used with such expertise that certain phrases, and certain images, will stay with us for life.

Ideally, the way a fantasy is written, the

words chosen to describe things, helps to create the fantasy world. While *The Cormorant* is set in contemporary Wales, Stephen Gregory's language creates a distinct and fascinating world, a world of tides and desolate beaches, of a maelstrom of gulls, and of the pet cormorant, Archie: "The cormorant stood with its chest pressed against the wire, its neck extended and the murder-beak jutting through. It had outstretched its wings and hooked them somehow onto the wire, gripping there like some prehistoric bird with clawed fingers. Archie stood erect, croaking and hissing, a black, malignant priest in a multitude of angels." The style draws us into the narrator's world, and into his obsession with the cormorant.

The narrator and his wife, Ann, have inherited the cormorant from his Uncle Ian. Ian also left them a cottage in Wales and some money, but they can keep these items only if they care for and keep the cormorant. The young couple is thrilled at their inheritance, since it means they can quit their teaching jobs and move with their toddler, Harry, to the cottage. They have already settled into their new life when the cormorant is shipped to them. The bird emerges from its crate and immediately attacks their comfortable world, knocking over vases and books and going to the bathroom all over everything. To the narrator, the bird first seems arrogant and vile, though later he begins to admire its candor, rebelliousness, and strength.

He sets it up in a pen in the backyard, but is soon taking the bird for day trips to the beach on a leash. Ann is uneasy with the cormorant, since it can seem kind one moment and attack the next, and her son seems drawn to it. As the cormorant's behavior grows worse, Ann finally decides to leave for a few weeks with Harry, until her husband can build a more secure cage. The narrator agrees with this, but as soon as his family leaves he begins spending even more time with the bird, taking it out on greater expeditions, and letting it into the house. These actions, which are done in a very matter-of-fact way, provide a chilling twist to the story. The narrator becomes totally dominated by the bird. It is inevitable that tragedy will strike, and it does, horribly. But in a haunting way, readers are actually left feeling sorry for the bird, as if we too had fallen under its spell.

For those of you who consider reading a "literary" novel like pulling teeth, consider *The Cormorant* a chilling novel of psychological horror, which happens to have some nice writing. For those of you who don't think "literary" and "fantasy" are mutually exclusive terms, this is an author you will want to read. With the strong sense of atmosphere he creates, Gregory has been compared to Poe, a "literary" writer most of us have no trouble enjoying. ❧

Jeanne Cavelos

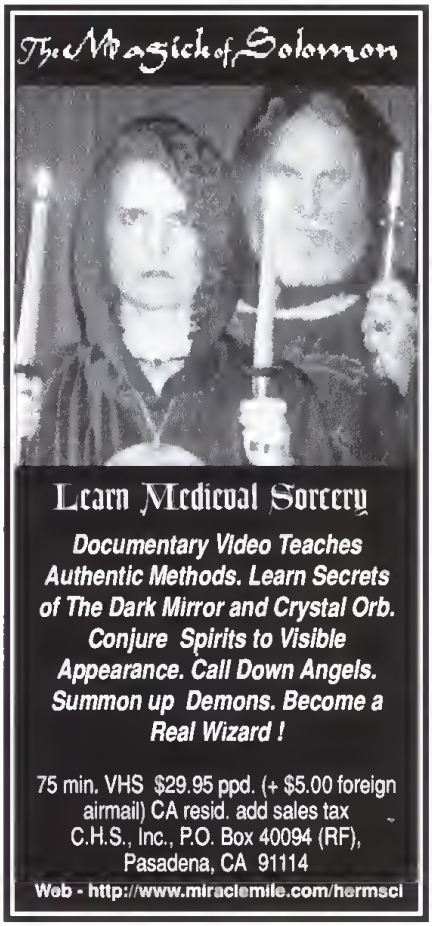


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Contributors

DEAN MORRISSEY, A SELF-TAUGHT artist, painted book covers illustrating other people's stories for more than a decade. But Morrissey's real dream was to illustrate his own stories. Morrissey's dream was realized with the publication of his first book Ship of Dreams, which became an instant bestseller. A native of Boston, Morrissey lives in Massachusetts with his wife and young son.

Jack McDevitt has won the Philip K. Dick Special award, and the UPC international prize for novellas. He has been nominated for the Nebula and the Hugo. His novels *A Talent for War* and *The Engines of God* have both been Locus bestsellers. HarperCollins recently published *Ancient Shores.* A short story collection, *Standard Candles: The Best of Jack McDevitt* is available from Tachyon Press. McDevitt has been a taxi driver, naval officer, English teacher, customs officer and motivational trainer. He lives in Brunswick, Georgia with his wife Maureen and his three children.

A.M. Dellamonica lives and works in Vancouver, British Columbia. A recent graduate of the Clarion West Writer's Workshop, Alyx's work has appeared in the U.S. in *Crank!* Magazine.

William Eakin's fiction has appeared in a many magazines, including *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, American Journal of Fantasy, Dark Regions, Samsara,* and others. Mr. Eakin has edited books for Orvis Books including *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions,* and *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology.* His poetry has been published in *Paradigms,* and *South and West: An International Literary Quarterly.* He resides in Arkansas.

David Beck's artwork has won numerous awards from the Society of Illustrators and Communication Arts. His work has graced the pages of *Science Fiction Age* and *Realms of Fantasy* in several issues. His original canvases are avidly collected: The Grateful Dead own thirteen or more of his pieces.

William Nabors says he's been a struggling writer forever. He's had stories in various anthologies and magazines, including *New Worlds, Fantastic,* and *Southern Voices.* He has collaborated with Jack C. Haldeman II on three interconnected novels that are making the rounds. He lives in Keystone Heights, Florida with Doris, his wife of 27 years, lots of cats and a dog and is perpetually writing novels.



Terri Windling



David Beck



Jack McDevitt



A. M. Dellamonica

TERRI WINDLING IS A WRITER AND painter who has worked extensively with myth and fairy tale themes. She is also a five-time winner of the World Fantasy Award for her editorial work, which includes the annual *Year's Best Fantasy & Horror collection* (co-edited with Ellen Datlow, St.Martin's Press) and many other anthologies and book series. Her first novel, *The Wood Wife,* has just been published by Tor Books. She divides her time between homes in Devon, England and in Tucson, Arizona.

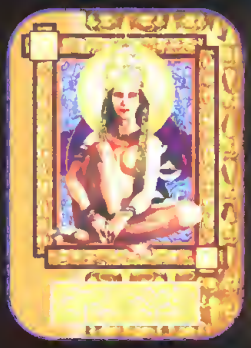
Mark Sumner is the author of six young adult novels, including *The Dark* recently released by Harper. He has a house in the Ozarks perched on the ugliest patch in three states. **John Berkey** hopes that you pause during your next stop-over at the Pittsburgh Air Terminal. That's because his twelve by six foot mural of a city of the future is hanging there to help you pass the time waiting for your next flight.

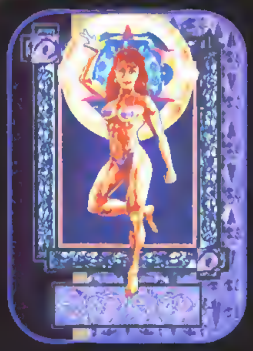
Gahan Wilson's cartoons are known chiefly because of his association with *Playboy,* but have shown up in periodicals as diverse as *The New Yorker, Weird Tales, Gourmet, Punch, Paris Match* and the cover of *Newsweek.* he's also written a number of children's' books in addition to spooky stories and mysteries for grownups.

He's recently begun experiments in two new fields: the comic book form, having done books on Poe and Ambrose Bierce with new projects underway, and in films. He recently completed his first animated movie, a gruesome cartoon short for 20th Century Fox called *Gahan Wilson's Diner.* He has also created A ROM disk interactive game called *Gahan Wilson's Haunted House.* ❧

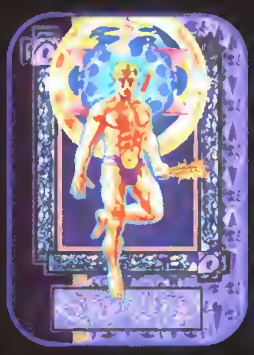


















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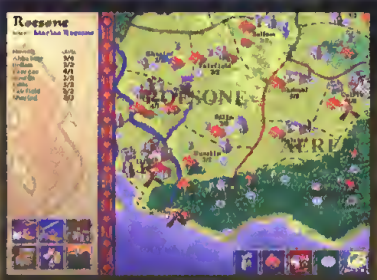
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